

THE THREAT FROM JAMAAT-UL MUJAHIDEEN BANGLADESH

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THE THREAT FROM JAMAAT-UL MUJAHIDEEN BANGLADESH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a terrorist organisation, remains active and dangerous despite the decimation of its ranks over the last five years. Its links to the Pakistan group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) remain a particularly serious concern. Since its coordinated bombing attack across the country on 17 August 2005, police have arrested hundreds of JMB members; they have also executed every member of its original leadership, including its founder, Shaikh Abdur Rahman. Its last successful attack was in January 2006. The state has succeeded in tackling the Islamist extremist threat to the extent that organisations such as JMB are struggling to survive. But the arrest of 95 JMB operatives since October 2008 and discoveries of huge caches of explosives demonstrate that JMB was able to regroup, recruit and raise funds. No one should take its demise for granted: the possibility of another attack remains, and the government should move quickly to create a planned police-led counter-terrorism force. It should also step up counter-terrorism cooperation, particularly with neighbouring India.

The crackdown after the 2005 bombings yielded a wealth of new data, much of it from court documents, about JMB's origins, aims, training, funding and leadership. While Shaikh Abdur Rahman deliberately sought out contacts with Pakistan-based jihadi organisations, including al-Qaeda and LeT, his goal from the beginning was the establishment of Islamic rule in Bangladesh. He had no broader jihadi agenda, nor was he interested in indiscriminate civilian casualties. JMB focused its attacks on government offices, particularly courts and judges. It was set up with two wings, one for *da'wah* (religious outreach) stressing the need for Islamic law, and a military wing, whose members, called *ehsar*, underwent rigorous training. At its height in 2005, it may have had as many as 2,000 *ehsar* in nine regional divisions, with its stronghold in Rajshahi, in the country's north west. Today, the number may be down to 250.

JMB initially had two main bases of recruitment: the network of mosques and schools associated with the Salafist organisation Ahle Hadith, and the youth wing of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami, called Islamic Chatra Shabir (ICS). Family networks were also important, with

members drawing in their brothers, sons and nephews. Within the top leadership, arranged marriages with women from top JMB families were instrumental in cementing solidarity. Since the 2005 crackdown, there has been less reliance on open *da'wah* meetings for fear of infiltration and more reliance on four madrasas run by JMB itself. There also appears to be an increase in recruiting from elite schools and universities.

Money was never a problem for JMB and even in its reduced circumstances it appears to have multiple sources of funding. After the crackdown it reduced its reliance on crop donations and a form of taxation in rural areas, again for fear of infiltration, but it draws on income from a number of local businesses. It also appears to rely heavily on donations from JMB members and supporters working in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In addition, its control of *hundi* operations – the system of sending money across borders without any electronic transactions that is also known as *hawala* – has been an important income-earner. The organisation is also involved in transnational crime: the arrest of a key leader in late 2008 revealed JMB's involvement in a counterfeiting ring run by LeT across South Asia, and in arms smuggling across the Indian border.

JMB's current strategy is to rebuild the organisation with a lower profile to gradually launch a Taliban-like military takeover of a district in the north west and use that as a base to establish Islamic law. Given its somewhat depleted resources and the new intelligence available to authorities following important arrests in 2008 and 2009, that goal seems wildly unrealistic. The one quality that the leadership has in abundance, however, is patience.

The danger from JMB is exacerbated by its links to other Bangladeshi and international jihadi groups and to members of the Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain. New information has revealed operational ties to LeT and to al-Muhajiroun, the groups whose members took part in the London underground bombings of July 2005. There has also been collaboration between JMB and a splinter of the once formidable but now diminished Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Bangladesh (HUJI-B).

Bangladesh's political mainstream has long understood the danger posed by JMB but has either deliberately used it for narrow political ends, as during the coalition government led by the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) from 2006 to 2007, or been distracted by other concerns. The current Awami League government is especially aware of the problem as its members have been victims of attacks. But internal wrangling, lack of coordination between security agencies and the absence of a single counter-terrorism force have undermined any sustained effort to dismantle the organisation.

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THE THREAT FROM JAMAAT-UL MUJAHIDEEN BANGLADESH

I. INTRODUCTION

When the Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) detonated 500 synchronised bombs in all but one of Bangladesh's 64 districts on 17 August 2005, analysts warned that it was waging an Islamic revolution that could destabilise the country. Four and a half years on, JMB is a much weaker force due to the arrest of hundreds of its members and the execution of its original leadership council, but it remains a potent threat with a proven capacity to regenerate. Its past and likely present ties to Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), the organisation responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attack and for a foiled December 2009 plot to target embassies in Dhaka, reinforce that threat.

JMB's resilience and current capacity are best assessed from looking at how it managed recruitment, training and funding before the 2005 bombings and subsequent crack-down, and what adjustments it made thereafter. JMB, like many other jihadi organisations, is constantly evolving and mutating; past actions are not necessarily indicative of future ones. It seems to have changed from mass to elite recruitment, restricted its rural activities and altered its funding base. While it may have lost hundreds of operatives to arrests and fear of arrest, those that remain are likely to be more fully committed and thus more dangerous.

JMB was able to grow from 2001 to 2005 with either passive disinterest, or sometimes active support, from top officials of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) government. When the nature of the threat it posed became clear after the 2005 bombings, Bangladeshi security forces, and particularly the paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) undertook a campaign of arrests that nearly succeeded in dismantling the organisation. But the government's loss of focus and complacency allowed it to regroup. A second crackdown in 2008-2009 has already netted close to 100 operatives, many of them new recruits. The danger is that the government will once again become distracted with new political priorities or other threats to the country's fragile stability, such as the February 2009 mutiny at the Bangladesh Rifles headquarters in downtown Dhaka, which left over 75 dead and prompted fears of a military coup. The government has enough problems to handle as it is. But the terrorism threat is real.

To ensure that counter-terrorism measures this time round are effective, both the government and donors need to understand how the organisation emerged, how it built its mass base, and what has changed in over a decade since its founding.

This report draws in part on interrogation and court depositions of arrested JMB leaders. Crisis Group is aware that there is a history of manipulation of documents and testimony in Bangladesh, and information is sometimes extracted through torture. It has supplemented and cross-checked this documentary material using published sources and extensive interviews with journalists, government officials, including those from security agencies, and current JMB members.¹

¹ For background on Bangladesh see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°121, *Bangladesh Today*, 23 October 2006; and N°151, *Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh*, 28 April 2008.

II. JMB BEFORE 2005

JMB was founded in 1998 by Shaikh Abdur Rahman out of his desire for a more militant jihadi organisation than then existed in Bangladesh. It was closely associated with the Salafist movement Ahle Hadith, and members were required to follow the movement's thought and practice. In the interests of recruiting as widely as possible, however, Abdur Rahman accommodated different Islamic schools when he found it expedient and his writings borrowed heavily from a broad range of Islamic thinkers ranging from fourteenth century Salafi scholar Ibn Taimiyyah to Jamaat-e Islami founder Maulana Maududi.²

From the beginning, JMB's objective was to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh. The "near enemy" – proponents of democracy in Bangladesh – was more important than the "far enemy", the U.S. and its allies. The organisation grew quickly, building on discontent within existing Islamist organisations. Its golden age was between 1998 and 2003. Virtually unnoticed by intelligence and security agencies, it recruited and trained, raised funds, ran operations and mobilised members without interruption across the north and in selected southern districts such as Chittagong, Jessore and Khulna.³ Stationed in a makeshift office in Dhaka, Abdur Rahman launched a two-pronged program, sending JMB members to run extensive *da'wah* (religious outreach) programs and later, tapping political powerbrokers and jihadi elements willing to support his agenda.⁴

²For example he was inspired by Maulana Abdul Rahim's *Ganatantra Noy, Jihad-e Kammo* (Desire Jihad, Not Democracy); Asadullah al-Galib's *Ahle Hadis Andolon* (Ahle Hadith Movement); Mujibur Rahman's *Imam Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab/ Fatwa Ibn-e Taimiyya* (Imam Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab / The Fatwa of Ibn Taimiyya) Abdul Wahab's *Sirat* (The Bridge); Jamil's *Al Jihad al-Qital* (The Armed Jihad), Maulana Maududi's *Al Jihad* (The Jihad) and Ibn Taimiyya's *Islamic Renaissance Movement's Pioneer*. See Task Force for Interrogation statement of Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, March 2006. Copy on file with Crisis Group.

³The intelligence agencies knew so little about JMB that when half of the group's *Majlis-e-Shura* members were arrested in 2003 on robbery charges, they were all released for insufficient evidence. Zayadul Ahsan, "They go free too easily", *The Daily Star*, 24 August 2005.

⁴Crisis Group interview, police official, Dhaka, April 2009. See also Task Force for Interrogation statement of Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, March 2006 and Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006. A copy of Rahman's deposition is on file with Crisis Group.

A. SHAIKH ABDUR RAHMAN AND THE FOUNDING OF JMB

JMB's history is inseparable from that of its founder. Shaikh Abdur Rahman's personal history is a case study of one man's gradual transition from piety to extremism. Born in Jamalpur on 7 January 1959, he began his schooling at a madrasa run by his father, a prominent Ahle Hadith scholar. Abdur Rahman's family was associated with one wing of the movement, the Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (AHAB);⁵ later, AHAB and its leader, Asadullah Ghalib, were to become virtually synonymous with JMB. Rahman studied at several other madrasas before receiving a scholarship to study at Medina University in Saudi Arabia where he stayed from 1980 to 1985. He returned home in 1986. During his last two years in Saudi Arabia, he developed a successful business with his brother-in-law, renting apartments to Bangladeshis during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.⁶

While in Medina, Rahman developed close contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood and sometime during his studies reportedly fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, although it is not clear when or under whose auspices.⁷ He also became involved in politics as international affairs secretary for the Medina branch of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami⁸ and a member of the Medina

⁵AHAB was founded in 1994 by Asadullah Ghalib, a graduate of Medina University and the head of Arabic at Rajshahi University. The group broke away from the apolitical Ahle Hadith movement led by a prominent academic Abdul Bari, who now leads the old Jamaat-e-Ahle-Hadith. AHAB's only significant political presence is in Bangladesh's north west districts. Ghalib strengthened AHAB's influence in the region by building countless mosques, madrasas, women's and children's networks and NGOs with funds received from Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti NGOs such as Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami and al-Haramain Foundation. Ghalib himself was arrested in 2005 following the August 17 bomb blasts, but was later released. Abdur Rahman's father, Abdullah ibne Fazle, taught at the famous Naopadara Ahle Hadith madrasa in Rajshahi.

⁶Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

⁷The BNP-led government reportedly excluded Rahman's Afghan experience from the interrogation report for fear it might damage the country's international image. Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, May 2009.

⁸Unless otherwise noted, Jamaat will be used to refer to the Bangladesh Jamaat-e Islami for the remainder of the report. Syed Abul Ala Maududi founded Jamaat-e-Islami in Lahore, in pre-independence India, in 1941. The party supported the Pakistani military regime during Bangladesh's 1971 War of Liberation. Sheikh Mujib, Bangladesh's first prime minister, outlawed it after independence. Most Jamaat members entered exile in Pakistan and only returned to Bangladesh after Ziaur Rahman took power in 1975. The Bangladeshi Jamaat was only legally established in 1979 and since then it has become the largest and most influential Islamist party in the country. Between 1996 and 2001 it was

chapter of its student wing, the Islamic Chatra Shabir (ICS). Then as now, ICS was seen as the first point of contact for young men wishing to join Islamic politics, but Rahman on his return became quickly disillusioned with the commitment of ICS and Jamaat to working through a democratic system to achieve an Islamic state. He went to work as a public relations officer for the visa section of the Saudi Arabian embassy in Dhaka in 1986, all the time looking for a more radical institutional affiliation. He left the embassy in 1991 to set up his own business.

Rahman says that in 1995, he began reading books on jihad lent to him by the local director of the Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) and decided to dedicate himself to jihadi activities. He therefore joined the only existing jihadi organisation in Bangladesh at the time, the Movement of Islamic Holy War (Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh, HUJI-B).⁹ He made every effort to impress his new colleagues, including paying the legal costs when 41 HUJI-B operatives were arrested in Ukhia, near Cox's Bazaar, in 1996. But in 1997, after they were all convicted, the HUJI-B leadership blamed him for the guilty verdicts and expelled him. Rahman claims that he left the group not only because of the court case but also because of differences with HUJI-B over interpretations of Islamic law.¹⁰ He took advantage of his several trips to Cox's Bazaar to establish contacts with the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), the ethno-nationalist insurgency fighting the Burmese government along the Bangladesh-Burma border.¹¹

The experience with HUJI-B made Abdur Rahman determined to set up his own organisation. He approached both AHAB's Ghalib and the head of a rival Ahle Hadith wing to discuss plans for a jihad in Bangladesh; Ghalib

told him the time was not right.¹² Then Abdur Rahman's brother, Waliur, introduced him to an Indian leader from Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT)¹³ named Abdul Karim Tunda alias Babaji, then living in Dhaka and reportedly in charge of LeT's operations in Bangladesh.¹⁴

Abdur Rahman pressed Tunda to help him establish links with al-Qaeda and Pakistani militant groups. In 1998, with Tunda's help, he travelled to Pakistan. There he met several LeT leaders, including its leader, Hafeez Saeed, and received training in arms, explosives, strategy and intelligence in Muzaffarabad along with guidance on how to build a jihadi organisation.¹⁵ After returning later the same year, however, he fell out with Tunda over the latter's insistence that the priority should be fighting India. For Rahman, who was executed by the government in 2007, establishing Islamic law in Bangladesh was more important. In April 1998, he brought seventeen other militants together, and JMB came into being.¹⁶

¹²Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, April 2009.

¹³The LeT is one of South Asia's most extreme jihadi groups. It was renamed Jamaat-ud-Dawa in 2002 after it was banned in Pakistan by then President Pervez Musharraf. For more on the LeT and other Pakistani jihadi groups, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°164, *Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, 13 March 2009.

¹⁴Task Force for Interrogation statement of Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, March 2006. As of late 2009, Waliur was working at Medina University and reportedly a major source of funds for JMB from Saudi Arabia. Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, May 2009.

¹⁵Task Force for Interrogation statement of Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, March 2006.

¹⁶In his 2006 confession, Abdur Rahman points out that in fact he was re-establishing an old organisation, not creating a new one: "Although JMB was re-created under my leadership it was born during the British colonial era. Back then the Islamic Jihadi group, Jamaat-ul Mujahideen, was led by Maulana Syed Ahmad and its first secretary was Maulana Shah Ismail, both of whom were martyred in the battle of Balakot. After partition in 1947, Amir Barkatullah Afghani was appointed the Amir of the East Pakistan Jamaat-ul Mujahideen. At that point, the organisational headquarters were located on the Afghan-Iranian border.... After the death of Barkatullah, Maulana Zillur Rahman Hamdani from Dinajpur took over the reins of the group. He was publishing a paper named *Al Mujahid* at that time. After his death around the mid-sixties, his son Nazmul Haq Hamdani took over. Under his leadership, the organisation was dormant. When I re-established the Jamaat-ul Mujahideen, Nazmul Haq Hamdani officially handed over the emirate and took his vow under my leadership". Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006 and "Information Related to Militant Activity in Bangladesh", RAB dossier, Dhaka, June 2009. A copy of the RAB dossier is on file with Crisis Group.

a member of the ruling BNP coalition government. In 2008 Jamaat changed the party's name from Jamaat-e Islami Bangladesh to Bangladesh Jamaat-e Islami to underscore its independence from foreign parties such as the Jamaat-e Islami Pakistan. However, it continues to maintain close links with its Pakistani counterpart. Crisis Group interviews, Dhaka, November 2008 and August 2009. For more on Jamaat see Crisis Group Asia Report N°121, *Bangladesh Today*, 23 October 2006.

⁹HUJI began as a Pakistan-based organisation in 1980 to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Bangladesh branch was formed in 1992 and was officially launched on 30 April 1992 and comprised mostly Bangladeshi veterans of the Afghan jihad. Among the HUJI operatives Abdur Rahman worked with were Mufti Abdul Hye (the amir); Mufti Shafique, Shaikh Farid, Abdullah and Faruk Hossain Khan, who later joined JMB and changed his name to Khaled Saifullah.

¹⁰Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

¹¹Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006. The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic group that speak a dialect of Bangla.

B. EARLY STRUCTURE

Abdur Rahman gave JMB a similar hierarchy to other Islamic organisations he knew in Bangladesh and Pakistan.¹⁷ Its structure was outlined in a book titled *Shamorik Shakhar Obhijaan Nirdeshika* (Operational Manual of the Military Branch) found with Rahman at the time of his arrest in 2006, but even at JMB's height, it is questionable whether all the roles and functions set out in the manual were fully operational.¹⁸

Led by an amir, the group from the outset had four tiers, each defined by level of responsibility and commitment to the organisation: *Majlis-e Shura*, *ehsar*, *gayeri ehsar* and *sudhi*. The first is a consultative decision-making council directly under the amir. JMB's first shura under Rahman consisted of six men, all but one of whom were from northern districts and who had formed a loose study circle in an Ahle Hadith school called Mohammadiya Arabiya Madrasa in Jatrabari, Dhaka. Nasrullah, from Thakuragon, had trained in Pakistan in 1989 and together with Rahman became the architect of recruitment, financing, operations and explosives training. Mohammad Rakib Hasan Russell alias Hafez Mahmud, from Jamalpur, had undergone twelve months of training with an unknown militant organisation in India in 1997. Alamgir Jahan Rana was a police sub-inspector from Bogra who continued to be employed by the police until he disappeared without a trace in 2005. Two others were Shahed bin Hafiz, also from Bogra, and Salauddin alias Salehin. The sixth man was Faruk Hossain Khan alias Khalid Saifullah, the only man known to have crossed over from HUJI-B.¹⁹

Three other influential members joined to form the second shura in the early 2000s: Rahman's younger brother Aatur Rahman Sunny, who was head of the JMB military wing; his son-in-law Abdul Awal; and the talented Siddiquil Islam alias Bangla Bhai, who became perhaps JMB's best-known member.²⁰

JMB's second tier is comprised of *ehsar* or full-time members. They run *da'wah* and military operations, recruit new members, raise funds and manage their areas of op-

eration.²¹ They are chosen after passing an examination. All must be committed followers of Ahle Hadith and have in-depth knowledge of the Quran and hadith, with the ability to translate from classical Arabic to Urdu or Bengali. *Ehsars* are required to live without a salary, give up personal "pride and submit to the organisation".²² They must be educated, either in madrasas or state schools. Once selected they must pass the different stages of military and hardship training, becoming expert in arms and explosives. It takes from six months to a year to complete the training required for *ehsar* membership.²³

The third tier consists of part-time members known as *gayeri ehsar*. These men are unable to leave their work or families, but pay regular dues and may receive low-level arms and explosives training. They are expected to provide refuge and hiding places if asked. The bottom tier consists of *sudhi* (well-wishers) or *saathi* (comrades) who provide funds and other assistance on request and also help provide safe haven to members.

The organisation is also divided into military and non-military wings, which are directed by the *Majlis-e Shura*. The military wing is entirely comprised of *ehsar*, with all others in the non-military wing.

It is in the description of the military wing that the manual begins to depart from reality, as JMB probably never had the personnel to staff it fully. Ideally, according to the manual, JMB would have six divisions, each with a chief and deputy, with one of the division chiefs serving as overall head of the wing. Each division would contain four sectors: ordnance, operations, intelligence and medical. The military wing also would oversee separate media and training sectors from the centre. Each sector would also have subdivisions. For example the ordnance sector would have four units: explosives, electronics technology, weapons collection and stockpiling. The operations sector would have two: guerrilla and *fedayeen* (suicide attackers). The first would be responsible for rapid deployment, with each division containing one or two of these units. The second would be responsible for large-scale attacks. Even if JMB was never able to make the full structure operational, its ambitions as a military organisation were clear.

JMB also divided Bangladesh into regional operational commands. At its height in 2005, it had nine: Dhaka North, stretching from Mymensingh to Netrokona; Dhaka South, from Narayanganj, through Dhaka city, up to Narsingdi; and one in each of the country's administrative regions at

¹⁷ Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

¹⁸ The JMB manual provides practical instructions, such as directing operatives to have no more than two members per safe house and directs them from keeping names, addresses or photos there. Members are also instructed not to mention names or places on the phone and encouraged to learn to use the internet. Abdur Rahman, "Operational Manual of the Military Branch", 2006. Copy on file with Crisis Group.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Bogra, June 2009. On Rana, see Hasibur Rahman Bilu, "JMB's former Shura man now a cop in Dhaka", *The Daily Star*, 11 May 2006.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, 23 April 2009.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

²² Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

²³ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

the time – Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna and Barisal²⁴ – except for Rajshahi, its stronghold, where there were three.²⁵

C. RECRUITMENT

The new organisation was able to recruit quickly from two main sources. One was the vast network of Ahle Hadith mosques and madrasas around Bangladesh, particularly in the north west. With strong linkages to Ahle Hadith “hub madrasas”, JMB relied heavily on recruitment of teachers and mosque staff such as imams and *muezzins*, who were then able to recruit others.²⁶ As it grew in the early 2000s, JMB established four of its own Ahle Hadith madrasas to cater to the children of its own operatives and members.²⁷

ICS, and to a lesser extent the Jamaat, were a second source of recruits. JMB targeted ICS and Jamaat activists who were either disgruntled with the policies of their leaders or inspired by the Afghan jihad and doubtful of democratic process ever delivering Islamic law. Chief among them was Bangla Bhai. A mid-level leader in the Rajshahi University ICS chapter, he became disillusioned in 1995 when Jamaat embraced democratic politics and promoted females into the party’s leadership.²⁸ Several other ICS men turned to JMB, including former shura leaders Hafez Mahmud and Salahuddin alias Salehin, citing similar reasons. Aatur Rahman Sunny, the head of JMB’s military wing, was also a senior ICS leader at Kushtia’s Islamic University, one of the biggest ICS chapters in the country. Most JMB recruits, however, came from small town ICS chapters.²⁹

Once converted to the JMB cause, former Jamaat and ICS activists were often used to recruit and train their former colleagues. For example Montejar Rahman, a former ICS and Jamaat leader, who left Jamaat, angry over its alignment with the female-led BNP, teamed up with Bangla Bhai and Sunny to train 36 young men at

his house in Joypurhat in 2003. Police raided the training session and arrested everyone, including 29 active ICS members who had been recruited across the north west.³⁰ JMB often extended its reach beyond ICS cadres to recruit on other university campuses and nearby youth hostels. For instance, Boma Mizan, JMB’s premier explosives expert and trainer, was recruited in early 2002 while at a hostel in Jamalpur.³¹

As the organisation grew, family networks became increasingly important for recruitment, with members often drawing in their brothers, sons, nephews and in-laws. The family bonds added an extra layer of security, reinforced the leadership structure and provided a path to promotion.³² As security concerns mounted JMB leaders made marriage within the group a requirement. Men who were already married were sometimes forced to take a second wife from trusted JMB families. Mizan, for example, had to marry JMB member Abdur Majid’s daughter Mariam, as he was not from the north west and not related to any other JMB member.³³ Bangla Bhai’s niece was likewise married off to Shahidullah Mahbub, a JMB *ehsar* and organiser in Rajshahi.³⁴

Women from JMB families were also seen as instrumental in strengthening alliances with organisations beyond Bangladesh’s borders. Al Amin, an Indian JMB member, currently working as one of the group’s explosives experts in Dhaka, was married to a Bangladeshi woman to strengthen his local ties.³⁵ The sister of an operative named Selim, who was in charge of smuggling of JMB men,

²⁴ Rangpur division, which was carved out of Rajshahi’s northern districts, was created on 25 January 2010.

²⁵ Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

²⁶ JMB concentrated its recruitment and training at only a few madrasas which it termed “hub madrasas”.

²⁷ One is in Jatrabari, a poor area of Dhaka, not far from the school where JMB was founded. A second, named Agram Dakhil Madrasa, is in one of JMB’s strongholds in Naogaon’s Atrai district. The third was started between 2002 and 2003 in Khulna when Jamaat was spreading into Jessore, Khulna and the south-western border districts. The fourth is in Abdur Rahman’s own district of Jamalpur, possibly one of several Ahle Hadith madrasas created by his father. This madrasa is said to have produced ten graduates who have become fully trained *ehsar*. Crisis Group interview, JMB *ehsar*, July 2009.

²⁸ “Bangla Bhai active for 6 yrs”, *The Daily Star*, 13 May 2004.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, May 2009.

³⁰ Zayadul Ahsan, “Jamaat link to militants become evident”, *The Daily Star*, 22 September 2005.

³¹ For more on Boma Mizan’s recruitment to JMB see Section II.E.

³² One of the best examples is the family of Nasrullah, one of JMB’s original Shura members. Nasrullah, who died while making a bomb in 2003, was the son of Mohammad Waziullah. Waziullah was a kindergarten principal in Dhaka at a school run by RIHS, one of JMB’s funders. Nasrullah’s brother-in-law, Shamsul Islam, was the principal of the Harpur Khamar Dakhil madrasa and leader of AHAB in Thakurgaon; he took part in the 17 August bombings, as did Shamsul’s brother Wahidul Islam. The latter’s nephew was also arrested in connection with the bombing, as were two of his brothers-in-law. Nasrullah’s uncle, Mohammed Barkatullah Morshed, was director of the Al Markajul Islamic madrasa and orphanage in Bagerhat; he was arrested for organising JMB training and taking part in the 17 August blasts.

³³ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009. Copy on file with Crisis Group.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009. Shahidullah was convicted in the high-profile murder of Professor Yunus of Rajshahi University in 2004.

³⁵ Julfikar Ali Manik, “JMB planned to kill, foil polls”, *The Daily Star*, 6 August 2009.

arms, explosives and counterfeit currencies across the Bangladeshi-Indian border in Rajshahi division, was married to a former shura member, Rafiqul Islam, who often used the alias Russel.³⁶ Islam eventually took charge of all JMB operations in Rajshahi, by extension overseeing Selim's smuggling operations.³⁷ Selim's other sister was married off to Abdur Rahim, another JMB member who was assigned to the Shibganj border in Rajshahi's Chapainawabganj district. The marriage links between the three men reportedly facilitated the smooth functioning of JMB's border operations in the area.³⁸

Women cemented ties between JMB families in others ways as well. For example, Abdur Rahman established a JMB women's branch in 2004, with around ten to twelve women in each cell. The women were responsible for *da'wah* programs and religious teachings, along with encouraging their relatives to join the jihad.

D. ONE MAN'S RECRUITMENT

JMB recruiters not only played up the political appeal of the organisation at a time of widespread disenchantment with BNP-Jamaat government; they also stressed membership as a path to both economic success and religious salvation. The case of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, the former head of JMB's Chittagong district, illustrates the use of its Ahle Hadith network, jihadi rhetoric and financial promises to economically vulnerable young men in its recruitment process.

Raised in Khulna division, Ahmad went to state schools and universities. However, as a result of his religious upbringing and the influence of his brother-in-law, he began following Ahle Hadith. Ahmad joined ICS in late 1999 while at university, but left the organisation within a few months over a dispute about Islamic dress codes. In March 2000, he met Masududdin Ishak, a homeopathic doctor and JMB recruiter in Khulna. After sounding Ahmad out over his political past, Ishak invited him to his dispensary where he spoke of the government's oppression of the *ulema* (Islamic scholars) and the importance of strictly adhering to the Quran and hadith in the face of Jamaat's betrayal of Islam. These arguments however were insufficient to convince the cash-strapped student more concerned with passing exams than joining a jihad. When he expressed these concerns, Ishak and other JMB recruiters replied, "What's the use of studying?"

A diploma will not get you into heaven. You have to take part in jihad – you have to become a *shaheed* (martyr)".³⁹

Ahmad's recruiters eventually agreed to cover his expenses. He was then taken together with 30 other young recruits to a mosque where they all received JMB code names. Over three days, the men listened to Salafist preaching and lectures on the persecution of Muslims in Bangladesh and abroad. The group was then given basic arms and martial arts training. Afterwards, a JMB recruiter in his mid-30s named Hazari pressed Ahmad for a month to become a full-time member, reminding him of his duty to remain true to Islam. Once assured of longer-term financial assistance by local JMB followers, Ahmad signed on and was sent to Rajshahi where he became an *ehsar* after undergoing further religious training. Between late 2001 and July 2002 he was JMB's top operative in Chittagong district, but was removed for being ineffective at convincing locals to abandon their traditional Islamic beliefs for the much stricter Ahle Hadith teachings.⁴⁰

E. TRAINING

From the beginning, JMB was committed to rigorous training for *ehsars*, distinguishing them from the part-time *gayeri ehsar*. The group's training methods reflected the experience of the founding members: Abdur Rahman, Nasrullah, Khalid Saifullah and Hafez Mahmud. Rahman as noted may have had some training in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s but also was trained by LeT and Tehrik-e Mujahideen in Pakistan in 1998. Nasrullah was trained in weaponry and explosives in 1989 in Pakistan; Hafez Mahmud received twelve months' training from militants in India in 1997 while Afghan veterans from HUJI-B trained Khalid Saifullah in Bangladesh.⁴¹ Building on what they learned in Pakistan, Rahman and Nasrullah trained the first batch of JMB explosives experts, including Khalid Saifullah, Salahuddin and Mollah Omar.⁴²

Basic training, which would usually involve groups of 30 to 35 young men in their early to late twenties, had three stages: a one-night initiation, followed by a three-day general training course, and finally, for those who showed promise, advanced instruction at jihadi training

³⁶ Islam also used the alias Zubaer.

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Dhaka, July 2009.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Bogra, June 2009.

³⁹ Court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005. Copy on file with Crisis Group.

⁴⁰ Court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005.

⁴¹ "Information Related to Militant Activities in Bangladesh", RAB Dossier, Dhaka, June 2009 and the court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

⁴² Ibid.

camps.⁴³ These camps were largely used to reinforce jihadi ideology and provide physical fitness, self-defence and basic arms and explosives training. All *ehsar*, and several *gayeri ehsar*, received this basic training, which could put the total number of trainees as high as 3,000.⁴⁴

As recruitment peaked in 2003 and early 2004, these classes grew as large as 300.⁴⁵ They would take place in mosques, madrasa compounds, wetland shoals called *chars* and open fields in remote areas. Trainees were given code names that were either numbers or Muslim names. The trainers, usually well-spoken senior leaders who could rouse the group with jihadi rhetoric, would put the men through a mix of religious, physical and military exercises.⁴⁶ Religious training included classes on Quranic recitation, lessons on *aqida* (faith) and *ikhlas* (integrity), discussions on Islamic politics and its application to Bangladeshi society, and the need to protect the faith through jihad. Trainees were often shown videos of the war in Afghanistan and fighting in Palestine.⁴⁷ To ensure discipline and loyalty to the organisation, they were told to be “ideal children” and to consider the oppression of Muslims globally as tantamount to the torture of their mothers and sisters.⁴⁸

For physical training, they were put through two-hour-long marches and tactical courses, and taught basic martial arts. By many accounts, most of the men struggled with the physical aspect of the training.⁴⁹ The weapons training, however, was well-organised and reflected the training received from Pakistan, Afghanistan and the RSO – but mostly without real guns. The trainers used blackboards to draw illustrations of the weapons, including Chinese SKS rifles – which are similar to guns used by elements of the Bangladesh security forces – AK-47 rifles, and pistols.⁵⁰ Trainees were given dummy guns to assemble and disassemble. The men were told the names of parts and their uses, but rarely did any trainer produce a real

rifle.⁵¹ Most had 9mm pistols, however, which were seemingly enough to impress most of the awe-struck trainees.⁵² Khalid Saifullah taught intelligence and counter-intelligence and ambush and counter-ambush techniques. Trainees were taught how to conceal their movements and identities, such as frequently changing phone numbers.⁵³ These instructions were often ignored in practice, however, resulting in the arrest of a number of operatives.

Hardship training was compulsory as a means to toughen up recruits and enable them to endure harsh living conditions while hiding for long periods. The men would be sent to various districts to stay with a group of other operatives, working during the day as rickshaw drivers or street hawkers and training during the night. The core objectives, according to Abdur Rahman, were to strip them of pride, establish conformity, and develop their minds and bodies to survive under adverse conditions.⁵⁴

The training courses were also used to identify promising candidates for leadership positions. During basic training, for example, JMB instructors would look out for trainees with technical college backgrounds to select for explosives training.⁵⁵ Boma Mizan is a prime example.

Educated at a polytechnic institute, he was identified early by his trainers. A JMB member named Sumon recruited Mizan by describing the oppression of Muslims in Palestine and how the 11 September 2001 attacks were part of a jihad to correct the injustices of the world. Sumon often cited quotations from the Quran and hadith to make the case for jihad. And Mizan was the perfect target: unemployed and rudderless, he was already familiar with political violence, having been expelled from a technical college for fighting linked to student politics.⁵⁶ He joined JMB soon after his expulsion, completing his preliminary training and taking part in operations within months. His history of violence also made him an attractive candidate to take part in crimes to raise funds between 2002 and 2005. He was tried and tested in sev-

⁴³ Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006. Information on the characteristics of the training group comes from the court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009 and “Information Related to Militant Activities in Bangladesh”, RAB Dossier, Dhaka, June 2009.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

⁴⁸ Court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009; court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005; and Taskforce for Interrogation statement of Abdus Sattar, Chittagong, 2005.

⁵⁰ Court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005.

⁵¹ Court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

⁵³ “Information Related to Militant Activities in Bangladesh”, RAB Dossier, Dhaka June 2009.

⁵⁴ Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, 2009.

⁵⁶ Student political activity is particularly vibrant in Bangladesh. Mostly a legacy from the Liberation War era, almost all of the country’s political parties have highly active student wings, which have often been at the centre of violent inter-party politics. Much of this violence occurs on college and university campuses. For more on student political activity see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°84, *Bangladesh: Elections and Beyond*, 11 December 2008.

eral bomb blasts and robberies of NGOs during this period, along with fellow future leaders such as Najmul alias Bhaigna Shahid.⁵⁷ Both men would be picked to receive explosives training from Nasrullah and Mollah Omar, eventually becoming chief trainers themselves.⁵⁸

JMB's first explosives course was held at a camp in Tangail, near Dhaka, with 30 men in 1998, followed by several smaller trainings at camps elsewhere, including one in northern Bangladesh where a former army lance corporal served as instructor.⁵⁹ The camps were run at first by Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Khalid Saifullah, then by Mollah Omar and Nasrullah, and finally by Boma Mizan.⁶⁰ They initially took place in *chars*, accessible only through water or hours on foot, or in remote villages.⁶¹ Around 2005, JMB was forced to move the training facilities to the Chittagong Hill Tracts due to intensive monitoring of its bases in the north west.⁶²

JMB also initiated a training exchange program with the militant Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), based in the Rohingya refugee camps in southern Bangladesh.⁶³ In 1996, Abdur Rahman came into contact with several senior RSO leaders in Chittagong, including Din Mohammad, Salimullah and Abdur Rashid, all believed

to be Afghan veterans.⁶⁴ He maintained contact with the group, establishing a training exchange starting in 2002 through which highly-trained RSO operatives provided arms training to JMB, while JMB trained RSO men in explosives.⁶⁵ JMB's top military men – Mollah Omar, Sunny, Tarik and Mizan – received arms training in the remote Naikkhangchari jungle as a part of this exchange. In 2003 Nasrullah, a shura member and explosives expert, died while trying to make a bomb during one of these sessions in Rangamati.

F. FUNDING

JMB's fundraising capabilities easily outstripped its achievements in military operations or recruitment. Its primary source of funds was initially and continues to be iyanat or donations, but in the early years, Abdur Rahman also sanctioned robberies against "enemies of Islam" such as NGOs with a history of promoting secularism, minority and women's rights and micro-credit operations. Between 2000 and 2002, several such robberies took place but they were stopped after numerous JMB members were arrested.⁶⁶

By 2004, political patronage in the form of donations had given JMB's income a massive boost to the point where money was "not a problem".⁶⁷ For example, the organisation was receiving thousands of dollars from state ministers and the Rajshahi mayor as late as April 2005.⁶⁸

⁵⁷ Mizan led the Mymensingh cinema bomb blasts on 7 December 2002 and later bomb blasts on a *jatra* (folk theatre) in January 2003. Mizan told his interrogators that he was involved in several robberies between 2002 and 2005. In March 2002, he took part in the Bangla Bhai-led robbery of a Brac office in Jamalpur, where they stole computers, power generators and money. He took part in similar robberies later that year, leading at least three of them in April 2002 at another Brac office in Khulna, and two others in Jamalpur and Sherpur. Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

⁵⁸ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

⁵⁹ "Ex Army corporal confesses to training militants", *The Daily Star*, 22 September 2005.

⁶⁰ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

⁶¹ The largest training sites were in the Bagmara-Atrai-Raninagar triangle in greater Rajshahi; Pantapara charlands in Bogra's Sariakandi sub-district; Tangail's Delduar area; and Pabnarchar in Nilphamari and Gaibandha. Training sites were located in other districts, but they were not as large. Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009; and Crisis Group interview, JMB member, June 2009.

⁶² The first JMB training facilities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts were on 1.4 acres of land and purchased in August 2005. The first of the camps were discovered by RAB on 26 September 2009. For more see Shariful Islam, "JMB finds chars, hills safe for training", *The Daily Star*, 29 September 2009.

⁶³ RSO merged with other Rohingya factions to form the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) in 1998. See "Rohingya Solidarity Organisation", *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, 22 May 2009.

⁶⁴ Rahman, who had contacts within the government, was in Chittagong at the time to secure the release several HUJI-B operatives in government custody. Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

⁶⁵ In order to secure the deal on arms training, Rahman agreed that if the RSO attacked Rakhine state, the Rohingya homeland in Burma, from Bangladesh, JMB would provide fighters to help. After Abdur Rahman's execution in 2007, there were no further reports of contact between RSO and JMB. See Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

⁶⁶ Bangla Bhai, Sunny, Awal and a host of other top JMB leaders were arrested at various points in connection with these robberies.

⁶⁷ According to his interrogation, Aatur Rahman Sunny asked his brother, Abdur Rahman, how he would fund the 17 August 2005 bombings, Abdur replied, "Money is not a problem". Aatur Rahman Sunny, Task Force for Interrogation statements, Dhaka, December 2005 and January 2006. According to some estimates, each of the 17 August bombs cost less than \$1, suggesting just the explosives themselves would not have cost more than \$500. Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, May 2009.

⁶⁸ On 26 July 2007, Aminul Haq, a former Rajshahi MP and telecommunications minister in the previous BNP-led coalition government, was sentenced to 32 years in prison for adding and abetting JMB. See Anwar Ali, "JMB patron Aminul jailed", *The Daily Star*, 27 July 2007. For a case study of how corrupt government ministers may have been channelling

One member claims JMB raised as much as \$215,000 a year at its peak in 2004, but Abdur Rahman said they had only \$10,000 left after militant operations in Rajshahi and in November 2005, his son-in-law Abdul Awal withdrew \$13,000 from bank accounts.⁶⁹ Another important source of funds were regular levies on members, especially from *gayeri ehsars* and *sudhis* living in rural areas, in the form of crop donations and taxes paid by JMB members.

Funds were also raised from arms smuggling operations. In early 2002, three Indian nationals named Mohammad, Belal and Salahuddin crossed the Indo-Bangladesh border at Godagari, Rajshahi, and met Abdur Rahman in Tangail to discuss running arms and explosives from India.⁷⁰ Belal was put in charge of the weapons smuggling operation between Maldah district in India's West Bengal state and Bangladesh, which earned JMB roughly \$200 a month. Between 2002 and August 2005, JMB purchased 30 pistols, 300 to 400 packs of power gel and 5,000 detonators from India to be smuggled into Bangladesh. The identity and nature of their collaborators on the Indian side, however, remains unclear.⁷¹

In terms of external funding, JMB also received funds from the now-banned Bangladesh office of the Kuwait-based organisation Revival for Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) through its local director, Mohammad Akramuzzaman.⁷² Akramuzzaman, the uncle of Nasrullah who was a member of JMB's first shura, was one of the first to introduce Abdur Rahman to jihadi literature.⁷³ RIHS was also closely linked with AHAB, whose chief, Asadullah Ghalib, filed RIHS's NGO registration in 1996. Ghalib told security officials that he received Tk270 million (\$3.8 million) each year from RIHS until 2005 when the organisation was banned in Bangladesh.⁷⁴ It is unclear how much of these funds were transferred to JMB, but Bangladesh's central bank and intelligence

officials believe the amounts were substantial, at least while Abdur Rahman was amir.⁷⁵

The strongest evidence of JMB's foreign funding came in June 2005, when two British men of Bangladeshi origin named Sajjad and Habibur Rahman, who claimed to be from the organisation al-Muhajiroun, paid JMB £10,000 (\$19,000) for help in establishing bases for arms production in Bangladesh. Some of the funds were used in the 17 August 2005 bombings. Aatur Rahman Sunny said Abdur Rahman also received money from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Brunei, Sudan, Pakistan and a variety of Islamic foundations but he could not name the sources and government data is sketchy.⁷⁶

G. OPERATIONS

JMB's operations have demonstrated that the group is capable of mounting well-coordinated and lethal attacks.⁷⁷ Well before the 2005 bombings, JMB had gradually raised the number and intensity of its operations as the organisation grew, moving from fund-raising robberies at NGO offices to bombings.

In 2002 JMB successfully exploded bombs in cinema halls and jattras (folk theatres) in Satkhira and Mymensingh that killed over 30 people and injured around 300 in a move against secular and cultural expression. It stepped up these operations in 2004, with an attack on well-known writer Humayun Azad, who was seriously wounded, and collaborated with AHAB affiliates to murder popular Rajshahi University professor Muhammad Yunus in December 2004. It also had plans to kill Nobel Peace Prize

bribes towards funding JMB see David Montero, "Bangladesh: Bribery's Dangerous Beneficiary", *Frontline*, PBS, 11 May 2009.

⁶⁹ Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006. See also "Key JMB den busted", *The Daily Star*, 24 November 2005.

⁷⁰ Task Force for Interrogation statements of Aatur Rahman Sunny, Dhaka, December 2005 and January 2006.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Mohammad Akramuzzaman is also known as Akramuzzaman bin Abdus Shahid. On 12 September 2005, RAB arrested Akramuzzaman but released him for unknown reasons a day later. His current whereabouts are unknown.

⁷³ Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006.

⁷⁴ Zayadul Ahsan, "Foreign funding, local businesses keep them going", *The Daily Star*, 22 August 2005.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bangladesh Bank official, Dhaka, July 2009. In November 2005, RIHS also released Tk20 million (\$285,000) to Ghalib days before a JMB suicide attacks on courthouse in Chittagong and Gazipur on 30 November 2005. See "Kuwait-based NGO using funds despite govt ban", *The Daily Star*, 28 March 2006. There are also allegations that RIHS continues to fund JMB operations through several front organisations. A Sudanese named Abbas Bao and a Kuwaiti named Abdul Aziz Khalaf Malullah, who were representing RIHS in Bangladesh, were deported on 6 April 2009. See "Funding militancy: Kuwait-based NGO director deported", *The Daily Star*, 10 April 2009.

⁷⁶ Task Force for Interrogation statements of Aatur Rahman Sunny, Dhaka, December 2005 and January 2006. Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, April 2009. A recent drive by the government's NGO bureau revealed that 19,000 NGOs were registered under the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government. However 17,000 of them have not submitted audit reports in over fifteen years. See Alpha Arzu, "Over 23,000 NGO activities unknown", *The Daily Star*, 11 July 2009.

⁷⁷ Taskforce for Interrogation statement of Abdus Sattar, Chittagong, 2005 and Court deposition of Abul Kalam Azad alias Ahmad, Chittagong, 26 October 2005.

winner Dr Muhammad Yunus (no relation), feminist writer Taslima Nasreen, newspaper editors and politicians.⁷⁸ But the group's rapid progress as a militant organisation was demonstrated most powerfully through the synchronised bomb blasts on 17 August 2005, quickly followed by a succession of nine attacks on left-wing cultural organisations and courthouses to further unnerve an already shaken public.⁷⁹

III. JMB AND THE BNP-JAMAAT GOVERNMENT

On 6 January 1999 Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and the Jamaat cemented an electoral alliance against the centre-left Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina. Jamaat voters helped propel the BNP-Jamaat coalition to power in the 2001 elections. For the first time in Bangladesh's history, an Islamist party was in a position to formulate policy. While some JMB leaders initially opposed Jamaat's unholy alliance with a party led by a woman, others, most importantly JMB chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman, saw the pact an opportunity.⁸⁰

Upon taking office, the coalition government began promoting JMB.⁸¹ The most striking example of cooperation took place in 2004 when JMB, on the instructions of the government, moved against the *sarbahara*, leftist militant groups operating in Bangladesh.⁸² The largest one, the Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) along with other *sarbahara* groups such as Gono Bahini, Janajuddha and PBCP-Red Flag, had long served as mercenaries for local politicians and businessmen or have robbed, assassinated and run extortion rings for money.⁸³

In his confession, Bangla Bhai insisted that the program to "annihilate" the *sarbahara* was undertaken at the request of local villagers rather than the government. He said locals promised to join *da'wah* activities if JMB would rid their areas of the *sarbahara* menace.⁸⁴ As a result, JMB took control over the Bagmara-Atrai-Raninagar triangle in greater Rajshahi, renaming it the "JMB Region" where it attempted to cleanse rural areas of crime and corruption. Adopting the name Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB or Awakened Muslim People of

⁸⁰ Rahman allegedly instructed his cadres to campaign for BNP and Jamaat candidates ahead of the elections. Crisis Group interview, journalist, Godagari and Rajshahi, March 2009.

⁸¹ For a broad summary of the BNP-led coalition's role in the rise of JMB, see Julfikar Ali Manik, "Trading in death under shadow of govt", *The Daily Star*, 21 July 2007.

⁸² Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, May 2009. See Also "Islamic Militants Unleash Terror on Minorities in Nowgaon, Bangladesh", Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities, 16 July 2004.

⁸³ *Sarbahara* is often used as a catch-all term for left-wing extremists groups operating in Bangladesh. The *sarbahara* movement, "in its history of over three decades, is a highly dispersed, low-scale and criminalised movement, consisting of a multiplicity of minor groups, no combination of which constitutes any significant threat to the country's security". Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Bangladesh: Red Bogey", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 23 June 2008.

⁸⁴ Court deposition of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, Mymensingh, 21 March 2006. Copy on file with Crisis Group.

⁷⁸ Task Force for Interrogation statements of Ataur Rahman Sunny, Dhaka, December 2005 and January 2006.

⁷⁹ For further details on JMB's operations see the South Asia Terrorism Portal's website at www.satp.org.

Bangladesh) for the operation, it unleashed a violent month-long campaign that included public beheadings and beatings of local Maoists, Hindus, Christians and political opponents.⁸⁵

Bangla Bhai described the support JMB received from the police in their operation against the *sarbahara*:

During our operation the Rajshahi division Superintendent of Police (SP) Masud Mia, Naogaon district SP Fazlur Rahman and Natore [district] SP helped us. We would inform the local police station before we would go on an operation [and then] we would hand over the *sarbahara* members and arms to police we recovered in the operation.⁸⁶

Likewise, one district police officer from the area noted, “Thanks to the JMJB vigilantes, police since 1 April [2004] have extracted confessions from [communist] outlaws on eight murders and recovered ten firearms and 50 bullets”.⁸⁷

In another incident in Naogaon, villagers reported to the local media that a force of 300 JMJB men backed by the police entered two villages and set up camp in the local madrasa on 17 May 2004. Police were seen coming and going from the camp while villagers suspected of having connections to the *sarbahara* were held there and in several cases beaten by their captors.⁸⁸ Overall, the Rajshahi operation, which was sponsored and sustained by several government ministers and approved by then Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, served to unite the sprawling JMB into one unit. It also served as a powerful source of propaganda, which earned it funds, spurred a sharp rise in recruitment in and around the region, built up the organisation’s confidence and provided it with nationwide publicity.⁸⁹

Cooperating with the government had two important consequences. First, it facilitated the integration of Jamaat and ICS with JMB. Many ICS branches, for example,

joined JMB during the *sarbahara* operations.⁹⁰ Second, it protected JMB from arrests until the 17 August bombings and may have secured the release of hundreds afterwards. An Islamist party and partner in the BNP-Jamaat coalition, Islami Oiyka Jote (IOJ), argued that it was primarily Jamaat that protected JMB members involved in violence.⁹¹ But the confessions of Abdur Rahman and other JMB members suggest that local BNP leaders in Rajshahi also provided significant financial, administrative and legal support.

Bangla Bhai himself was in contact with senior officials to request protection although he says they failed to deliver:

During my stay in Mymensingh [after May 2004], I was in telephone contact with the then Land Minister Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu, State Minister for Housing and Public Works Alamgir Kabir, BNP Members of Parliament (MP) Nadim Mustafa, Shamsuddin Pramanik, Salek Chowdhury and Rajshahi mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu. We discussed the *sarbahara* annihilation program. I requested them to free us from police harassment if the people had benefited from the operation. I also asked them not to harass [my] innocent relatives.... In reply, they all assured me they would take the necessary steps after contacting government high-ups. They also told me to stay in hiding.... I ceased contact with them around January 2005 after not receiving a positive response from any of them.⁹²

The BNP-led coalition continued to deny JMB’s existence throughout 2004, instead blaming the Awami League for manufacturing militancy to tarnish the government’s image.⁹³ However, after a series attacks on

⁸⁵ “Trail of terror attacks”, *The Daily Star*, 31 March 2007.

⁸⁶ Court deposition of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, Mymensingh, 21 March 2006.

⁸⁷ “Tales of horror: Cops help Bangla Bhai free from Naogaon”, *The Daily Star*, 29 May 2004.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, May, 2009. See also Julfikar Ali Manik, “Trading in death under shadow of govt”, *op. cit.* A former *ehsar* said that he joined JMB not only as a committed Muslim, but also more importantly, as a farmer who wanted to protect his land. He said he wanted to cleanse his home district of Naogaon, of “un-Islamic and criminal elements like *sarbaharas*”. Crisis Group interview, former JMB member, Bogra, June, 2009.

⁹⁰ One ICS leader, Tarikul Islam, was convicted of smuggling arms for JMB across the Indian border. Islam was head of an ICS chapter in Godagari district in Rajshahi. Crisis Group interview, journalist, Rajshahi, March 2009.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Fazlul Haque, Amini, IOJ Chairman, Dhaka, 12 April 2009. See also “Govt hiding info about bombers to protect Jamaat”, *The Daily Star*, January 2006. The IOJ is an Islamic political coalition comprising seven parties that follow the Deobandi tradition. It is more rurally-oriented than the Jamaat and has focused on using madrasas to build political support. It has spearheaded anti-Ahmadi campaigns and has a less reasonable and sophisticated image than that projected by the more polished Jamaat leaders. For more on the IOJ, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°121, *Bangladesh Today*, 23 October 2006.

⁹² Court deposition of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, Mymensingh, 21 March 2006.

⁹³ In January 2005, the BNP State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar told reporters that, “We [the government] do not know any Bangla or English Bhai (brother) ... no Bhai is important to us”. In another interview he said, “We don’t know officially about the existence of the JMJB. Only some so-called newspapers are publishing reports on it. We don’t have their con-

NGOs the government came under intense domestic and international pressure to ban the JMB, which it eventually did on 23 February 2005. Asadullah Ghalib, the amir of AHAB, JMB's chief benefactor, was arrested the same day.

IV. 2005-2007: THE 17 AUGUST BOMBINGS AND THE CRACKDOWN

A. THE ATTACKS

On 17 August 2005, in a masterpiece of timing and coordination, JMB exploded some 500 bombs in all but one of Bangladesh's 64 districts between 10:30am and 11:30am local time. JMB claimed the goal was not to kill civilians, although two people died and some 50 were injured. It was rather to get publicity for the group and underscore the need for Islamic rule.⁹⁴ At Abdur Rahman's direction, some 30,000 leaflets were distributed around the country, claiming responsibility for the attacks and explaining the rationale:

Aware of the command of Allah and following our obligations to the faith, the Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh rejects the existing judicial system. The constitution, under which the country is currently being ruled, is bound to conflict with the rules of Allah. Therefore, [we urge] all concerned to shun the existing system and the so-called electoral system, and call for the rule of the country according to Allah's command and the Prophet's way. Otherwise, Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh has the strongest resolve to establishing Allah's faith in Allah's world through the full implementation of the Allah-ordered *qital* (battle).⁹⁵

The group's primary targets were Bangladeshi, but Western countries and NGOs were also called to "quit Bangladesh" or "face consequences". JMB also saw the attacks as launching a revolution: "Our aim was to topple the government through a mass upsurge, then capture power and establish the rule of Islam," one of its leaders told the court during his trial in early 2006.⁹⁶

The attack, under the direction of Ataur Rahman Sunny, was planned in a JMB shura meeting at the home of another operative in Mymensingh on 1 June 2005.⁹⁷ Those present decided to target courthouses and other

⁹⁴ Court deposition of Abdur Rahman, Sylhet, 12 March 2006. See also "2 Britons funded JMB to carry out bomb attacks", *The Daily Star*, 9 February 2006.

⁹⁵ JMB leaflet "Call to Implement Islamic Law in Bangladesh", distributed 17 August 2005. Copy on file with Crisis Group. The text was sent around by email to operatives in each bombing site; the operatives were supposed to print it locally. See "Kakrail Mosque was used to train Aug 17 bombers", *The Daily Star*, 26 September 2005.

⁹⁶ "2 Britons funded JMB to carry out bomb attacks", op. cit.

⁹⁷ Mymensingh district is in northern Dhaka division. According to Bangla Bhai, the meeting took place in Mymensingh's Muktagacha sub-district. Court deposition of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, Mymensingh, 21 March 2006.

stitution in our record". See "Mystery shrouds Bangla Bhai's power", *The Daily Star*, 27 January 2005.

symbolic buildings; Sunny had already arranged for the distribution of explosives around the country.⁹⁸ On 14 August the operatives were given, at the Kakrail Mosque in Dhaka, the centre of activities for the nonviolent Tablighi Jamaat movement, last-minute instructions on how to detonate the bombs. The site was chosen because the mosque's crowds would easily conceal a small group meeting – there is no indication of Tablighi involvement.⁹⁹

While most of the operatives were JMB members, the bombings revealed a clear link between the JMB and HUJI-B. An arrested Indian LeT operative named Mufti Obaidullah told officials that JMB sought and received help from a HUJI-B splinter known as the Tamiruddin faction or the Tanjin-e-Tamiruddin, in conducting explosions in at least 22 districts of the 63 districts targeted.¹⁰⁰

Police, led by the paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), began arresting JMB members almost immediately, but the attacks continued, with the explicit aim of destabilising the country. During the first week of September, Sunny held a meeting with other shura members at his house in Basabo in Dhaka. Those present were told that Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai had given orders to “throw bombs on judges, magistrates, lawyers and policemen to create panic among people that would ultimately lead to the fall of the government”.¹⁰¹ Accordingly JMB created a suicide squad, reportedly called the Shaheed Nasrullah Al Arafat Brigade whose operatives carried out several attacks between October and December in Gazipur, Chittagong and Netrokona.¹⁰²

JMB used bombs disguised as books in the attacks at Chittagong and Gazipur, which killed two people and injured another 38. The suicide bomber for a November blast, which killed two judges, chose not to detonate the explosives strapped to his body but rather hurled the bomb

at the targets. He had kept the judges under surveillance for several weeks to map out their daily travel route. Attacks on Chittagong and Gazipur courts on 29 November were the first successful suicide bombings, which killed nine people, including two more judges. A hot-water flask was wired as a bomb for the 1 December attacks that killed two people. On 9 December, a suicide bomber killed seven people in Netrokona.¹⁰³

B. THE CRACKDOWN

Abdur Rahman claimed in his judicial confession that after the 17 August bombings, he did not expect a backlash from the government or the public since no one was supposed to be hurt. This proved to be a colossal miscalculation – the BNP government, which had hitherto denied JMB's existence while quietly cooperating with it, was forced to act under heavy domestic and international pressure.¹⁰⁴ By 2006 the government had charged around 520 JMB members and in March 2007, it executed the entire JMB shura, including Abdur Rahman.¹⁰⁵

Jamaat MPs, using their political clout, reportedly oversaw the release of hundreds of suspected JMB members and sympathisers arrested during the crackdown.¹⁰⁶ One incident in 2005 involved a senior JMB operative named Shamim. Aside from being the eldest son of JMB's current amir, Saidur Rahman, Shamim was also the former head of the organisation's information technology (IT) wing, which sought to collect, translate and distribute bomb-making manuals from the internet among other operatives. Despite Jamaat's claim of having no contact with Shamim or his father, a local Jamaat leader at the time, Ashraf Uddin, telephoned the district police chief and asked him to release Shamim.¹⁰⁷ He told the police chief that Shamim was a “good boy” and that police had arrested him by mistake.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁸ Court deposition of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, Mymensingh, 21 March 2006.

One of the arrested would-be suicide bombers told police that all the planning had taken place at an Ahle Hadith mosque in Shakhipur. “Attack planned Shakhipur mosque”, *The Daily Star*, 1 December 2005.

⁹⁹ “Kakrail Mosques was used to train Aug 17 bombers”, op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ The faction leader, Mufti Abdur Rouf, is currently in jail. He and his followers are believed to have trained with JMB at the RSO training camps in 2002. Intelligence officers are currently investigating unconfirmed reports that JMB even hired a sarbahara outfit, Lal Pataka, for their 2005 attacks in Jhenidah. This would reinforce arguments that JMB had no particular hatred for sarbahara as such, but were merely carrying out their patrons' orders during the anti-sarbahara operations in Rajshahi in April 2004. Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹⁰¹ “2 Britons funded JMB to carry out bomb attacks”, op. cit.

¹⁰² “Oct 3 blasts at court planned by Abdur Rahman's brother”, *The Daily Star*, 9 October 2005.

¹⁰³ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group Report, *Bangladesh Today*, op. cit., pp. 18-20.

¹⁰⁵ “Information Related to Militant Activity in Bangladesh”, RAB Dossier, Dhaka, June, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, January and April 2009. Locals claim that at least 500 of the arrested men were released by direct orders from Jamaat MPs and ministers. For more on MPs interfering in police work see Crisis Group Asia Report N°182, *Bangladesh: Getting Police Reform on Track*, 11 December 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Ashraf Uddin was Jamaat's amir in Sylhet division's Habiganj district when he placed the call.

¹⁰⁸ Zayadul Ahsan, “Jamaat link with militants becomes evident”, *The Daily Star*, 22 September 2005.

The crackdown separated the committed JMB cadres from those less inclined to take part in jihad. Several *ehsars*, including senior trainers, left for jobs in the Middle East or fled to India.¹⁰⁹ For example, Titumir, an explosives trainer recruited by Hafez Mahmud in Bogra around 2000, who took up work in Kuwait, still maintains contact with the group.¹¹⁰ A large number of *gayeri ehsars* and *sudhis* have gone back to their villages where they maintain low profiles, but continue to follow Ahle Hadith practices.¹¹¹ Most court depositions of arrested *gayeri ehsars* suggest they rarely had a tight bond with their leaders or the JMB ideology, and several JMB members became government informants after they were threatened with arrest and imprisonment. An intelligence official said the government was also able to turn a significant number of *sudhis* and *gayeri ehsars* with only small amounts of money.¹¹²

V. CHANGES SINCE 2007

Though JMB has been weakened by these arrests, it has adapted to the challenges and demonstrated a capacity to regenerate: the leadership council, *Majlis-e-Shura*, has been recast at least three times since the March 2007 executions, and members were able to regroup and continue fundraising, training and recruitment from hideouts in India, the north west, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

A. CURRENT STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

While JMB's structure survived the crackdown with some modifications, many of the leadership posts remained unfilled after the executions. Organisational priorities shifted, with an early focus on recruitment giving way to a narrow focus on military strength.

Maulana Saidur Rahman alias Abu Zafar took Abdur Rahman's place as amir after the 2007 executions. The former Jamaat amir for Habiganj district, he was "officially" expelled in 1989 for his "extremist" views, but one official said he remained Jamaat's de facto leader in the district throughout the 1990s. "It is an old strategy of Jamaat to disown men who tarnish their image", the official said.¹¹³ Saidur forged close links with other militant organisations in Bangladesh.¹¹⁴ He became one of Abdur Rahman's most trusted advisers and patrons, entrusted with his finances and safety during the crackdown. Saidur also rented the house in Sylhet where Abdur Rahman was arrested. In January 2009, a Sylhet court tried him in absentia in an explosives-related case and sentenced him to fourteen years in prison.¹¹⁵

Saidur, who authorities believe is in Bangladesh, replaced the leadership largely with veteran members who had been trained directly by Abdur Rahman or had taken part in past JMB operations.¹¹⁶ This second shura was short-lived, with two of its members arrested in late 2006. There was an exodus of members to India around this time, including several more senior operatives. JMB thus rebuilt the shura again in mid-2007 with relative unknowns. As JMB regrouped between 2007 and 2008 these men started

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interviews, JMB member, Rajshahi, June 2009 and intelligence official, Dhaka, June 2009. See also Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, locals in Bagmara and Rajshahi, March 2009.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, July 2009.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, April 2009.

¹¹⁵ Julfikar Ali Manik, "Mirpur ammo seizure led to Comilla raid", *The Daily Star*, 25 December 2008.

¹¹⁶ Saidur has evaded arrest by routinely moving between JMB safe houses. He was nearly arrested in Dhaka in November 2009. See "JMB chief's wife held", *The Daily Star*, 2 November 2009.

to return to Bangladesh and demanded leadership roles.¹¹⁷ They were accommodated in the current shura formed in November 2008.¹¹⁸

According to Boma Mizan, who was arrested in April 2009, the members as of mid-2009 were Saidur Rahman, the amir; Mohammad Mahfuz alias Sohel Mahfuz, in charge of Dhaka operations; Najmul Shahid alias Bhaigna Shahid, military commander; Sayem, the group's IT expert; Osman alias Shahed, in charge of Chittagong; Mehdi Hassan alias Abeer, responsible for the south west; and Zahirul Islam.¹¹⁹ The last two were arrested on the outskirts of Dhaka on 26 November 2009.¹²⁰ Two others have left the country. Shahed reportedly fled to Pakistan in early 2009 after JMB's plans to assassinate political leaders and attack Bengali cultural festivals were foiled.¹²¹ Sayem, who was part of Abdur Rahman's inner circle, is reportedly hiding in India.¹²²

Najmul alias Bhaigna Shahid is perhaps the new shura's most powerful member and commands JMB's base in the northern region and all its military operations. He was an early recruit of Nasrullah from his home village in Thakurgaon in the far north and was trained by him in explosives.¹²³ Known for his loyalty to Abdur Rahman, Najmul was notorious during the 2004 Rajshahi operations as a ruthless but calm organiser and was one of the explosives experts for the 17 August 2005 bombings. After Boma Mizan's arrest, Najmul took charge of explosives training, bomb-making and stockpiling.¹²⁴ He also was the main proponent of a more cautious approach to insulate the organisation from further arrests.¹²⁵

The linchpin in JMB's current leadership structure is Saidur's son Bashar, who is not part of the shura. Bashar's importance is due to structural changes made in early 2009 to tighten security. Before, JMB's configuration allowed for the free flow of information throughout its ranks. This meant that even mid-level members possessed detailed knowledge of the group's plans, locations of its leaders, other cadres and weapons caches, and made the JMB

highly vulnerable to confessions by arrested operatives.¹²⁶ To reduce exposure, the structure was reconfigured to limit the information each cell has about others. Bashar was made the intermediary for all communication between Saidur, division heads, financiers and shura members.¹²⁷ Although a number of leaders have been arrested since the reconfiguration, including Boma Mizan, Bashar's role has protected Saidur, who has repeatedly eluded security officials.

The current shura also reorganised the JMB's regional operational commands. Two Rajshahi divisions were merged, as were the two Dhaka commands, reducing the overall number of commands from nine in 2005 to seven in 2009.¹²⁸

Several attempts by senior operatives to break with JMB have raised questions about the organisation's cohesiveness. The splits are largely a result of tensions arising from the leadership vacuum left by arrests and executions; differences over strategies; funding disputes; and low morale due to the success of the government crackdown. In 2007 a small faction broke away to form Jadid al-Qaeda (New al-Qaeda) over the JMB's decision to temporarily refrain from military attacks, as well as allegations of financial corruption by some shura members. However, the faction vanished the same year after attempting to explode three weak bombs at two train stations in Dhaka and Sylhet.¹²⁹

A more significant split occurred in April 2009, when two senior lieutenants – Selim alias Saifullah and Shahadat alias Abdur Rahim – formed their own faction named Islam O Muslim (Islam and Muslims). The brothers-in-law, who were in charge of JMB's border trafficking, broke with JMB for similar reasons as Jadid al-Qaeda. They asked some twenty JMB operatives also beset by low morale to join their new group.¹³⁰ One of those approached

¹²⁶Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, April 2009. The mergers were largely a result of the arrest of its Dhaka North commander Anwar Hossain; the Dhaka South and Chittagong head Asadul Islam; and the influential Rajshahi division head Rafiqul Islam or Russel in October 2008.

¹²⁹Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009. For more on Jadid al-Qaeda see "Blasts rock Bangladesh stations", BBC, 1 May 2007, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6610667.stm.

¹³⁰During his interrogation, Selim said that Islam O Muslim members had become suspicious that shura leaders were swindling the group's funds. Their suspicions were roused by a new house built by shura member Najmul alias Bhaigna Shahid in his home village. Crisis Group interviews, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹¹⁷Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹¹⁸Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Dhaka, June 2009.

¹¹⁹Mehdi Hassan also uses the aliases Zahid and Badal. Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹²⁰"Rab captures six JMB operatives", *The Daily Star*, 27 October 2009.

¹²¹Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009. For more on JMB's strategy and tactics see Section F below.

¹²²Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, May 2009.

¹²³Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

said, “The shura had decided to maintain a low profile because of the ongoing arrests. But he [Selim] thought the group needed to show force through attacks with rifles like the Mumbai attack”.¹³¹ While Islam O Muslim was said to be supported by India’s West Bengal Ahle Hadith network, it is unlikely to pose much of threat: its entire leadership was arrested in July 2009.¹³²

B. MEMBERSHIP STRENGTH

The loss of so many leaders and foot-soldiers after the crackdown means that JMB is unlikely to recover its pre-2005 size and strength. However the remaining cadres are committed and therefore dangerous. Most government officials agree that approximately 1,500 were arrested, but that only 550 of them had JMB links.¹³³ At the end of 2009, the RAB arrested twelve members of three different shuras, of which half were executed, 118 *ehsars*, 22 *gayeri ehsars*, nineteen potential suicide bombers and over 400 other cadres.¹³⁴ It is not known how many were released and returned to the organisation.¹³⁵

Intelligence officials, JMB activists and individuals close to organisation say that JMB at present does not have more than 250 active *ehsars* and around 1000 active members.¹³⁶ At its peak in early 2005 former JMB members and intelligence officials say the group had close to 2,000 *ehsars* and around 5,000 *gayeri ehsars*.¹³⁷ However, some journalists who closely followed JMB between 2004 and 2005 say the number could have been double that based on movements of operatives to JMB camps.¹³⁸

In his surprisingly candid interviews to the press in May 2004, Abdur Rahman claimed JMB had 10,000 *ehsars*, 100,000 *gayeri ehsars* and 1 million *sudhis*.¹³⁹ Government officials, academics and the media, who were unsure of JMB’s size, strength or influence, uncritically accepted these figures for several years. The 17 August bombings further contributed to overestimation of JMB’s strength, with some analysts suggesting the existence of a huge foreign-funded Islamist militant and political network across Bangladesh.¹⁴⁰ However testimonies and confessions by arrested JMB leaders and interviews with former JMB members suggest that the membership figures cited were grossly exaggerated.

JMB’s strongest network remains around Ahle Hadith mosques in the north west. With funding from overseas, AHAB in particular has continued to expand rapidly across the north and north west, including in JMB strongholds in the greater Rajshahi and greater Rangpur regions, radicalising communities as it does so. Many former JMB operatives have found sanctuary in its growing number of madrasas and mosques. “Former JMB members are always aggressive about their Ahle Hadith ways when they walk past our mosques. They say that we do not pray properly and regardless of how much we pray we will still go to hell”, said one villager in Rajshahi.¹⁴¹

According to locals in Rajshahi, former JMB members are easily recognisable during the Friday prayers because they pray separately. A villager in the former JMB stronghold of Bagmara said in August 2009:

They had gone into hiding for a while. A lot of them were jailed too. But they worked in the [December 2008 parliamentary] elections. We saw they have not surrendered the arms they used to carry. But they have gone into hiding following the Awami League victory in elections.¹⁴²

It is unclear whether these Ahle Hadith mosque networks provide structural support or funding to JMB, but at a minimum they guarantee shelter and protection to its members. Intelligence sources say AHAB provides JMB a convenient platform for it to continue its activities

¹³¹ Crisis Group telephone interview, JMB member, July 2009.

¹³² Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, RAB official, January 2009; and “Information Related to Militancy in Bangladesh”, RAB Dossier, Dhaka, June 2009.

¹³⁴ The number of arrests is based on Crisis Group interviews with RAB officials, RAB intelligence documents shown to Crisis Group and media reports.

¹³⁵ For a history of unexplained releases of militants, see Zayadul Ahsan, “They go free too easily”, *The Daily Star*, 24 August 2005.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, intelligence official, Dhaka, July-August 2009, and JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

¹³⁷ It remains an estimate at best. Former JMB members who were at the Rajshahi camp in 2004 base their estimate on the number of *ehsars* who would arrive every week from other districts and the JMB’s strength elsewhere in the country. Crisis Group interviews, intelligence official and JMB *ehsar*, June 2009.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, journalists, Dhaka, January and June 2009.

¹³⁹ Julfikar Ali Manik, “Bangla Bhai active for 6 yrs”, *The Daily Star*, 13 May 2004.

¹⁴⁰ Many journalists and analysts at the time believed in the existence of a monolithic Islamic movement – headed by Jamaat and funded by Middle East charities tied to al-Qaeda, and operated by a mujahideen network comprising HUJI-B and JMB. For example, see “Profiles show them interlinked”, *The Daily Star*, 28 August 2005.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, villagers, Bagmara, Rajshahi, March 2009.

¹⁴² Ibid. For more on threat of militancy during the Bangladesh’s December 2008 parliamentary elections, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Bangladesh: Elections and Beyond*, op. cit.

covertly. Several JMB members arrested after 2005 told authorities they were part of the AHAB network and Ghalib was their leader.¹⁴³

JMB's primary base remains in Rajshahi and the newly created Rangpur division in the north west, but it has established new bases in Dhaka to seek refuge in the anonymity of the densely populated capital. Of the 98 JMB operatives arrested since October 2008, 24 were arrested in southern divisions, such as Khulna, Barisal and Chittagong, while the rest were mostly from Rajshahi, with some arrests made in greater Mymensingh and Dhaka.¹⁴⁴ By 2009, JMB had started to establish a chain of camps running south from Rajshahi to Dhaka to move operatives back and forth.¹⁴⁵ At least nine *ehsars* were arrested in 2009 from Dhaka's sprawling industrial areas, especially the export processing zones in Gazipur, revealing the area to be the hideout of choice for the JMB leadership.¹⁴⁶ Boma Mizan, in his interrogation, also revealed that he had been training around fifteen new recruits to manufacture explosives and ammunition in Dhaka's suburbs, especially Mirpur, where significant bomb caches were found in two apartments after Mizan's arrest.¹⁴⁷ This suggests that Dhaka may be at risk of further attacks.

A large number of *ehsars* who fled across the Rajshahi border to the Indian state of West Bengal have set up JMB operations there with around 25 Indian and Bangladeshi members. An Indian national named Saif is said to be in charge of the Indian wing, operating in Nadia, Maldah and Murshidabad districts. He runs the operations from an office in Bahrapur, a town in Murshidabad, which serves as a hideout for fugitive JMB operatives, such as shura member Sayem. This wing smuggles guns and bomb-making equipment across the border, along with *da'wah* programs conducted by some twenty to 25 JMB members.¹⁴⁸ It also maintains contacts with other Indian militant groups.

C. RECRUITMENT

Recruitment patterns have undergone some major changes since the crackdown. There is now less emphasis on open *da'wah* sessions for fear of infiltration and more attention to JMB's four training madrasas in Khulna, Jamalpur, Naogaon and Dhaka.¹⁴⁹ These madrasas run on the principle that "Ten competent operatives are more effective than a hundred incompetent ones".¹⁵⁰

Some analysts point to JMB's current focus on elite schools and universities as evidence of a shift in recruitment patterns. In fact, JMB had targeted such schools for the past decade and many of its senior leaders attended universities after graduating from madrasas.¹⁵¹ In the past the aim was to recruit young men already initiated into Islamic politics chiefly through ICS; now it may be looking more broadly. The June 2009 arrest of a senior operative and the group's information technology expert, Emranul Haque alias Rajiv, seemed to confirm suspicions that JMB is recruiting in elite institutions. Rajiv was a research associate and a civil engineering graduate at a prestigious university – the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).¹⁵² Aside from recruiting at BUET, Rajiv told the RAB that his responsibilities for the JMB included downloading "information on explosives from internet, translating it into Bengali and sending it to [Boma] Mizan through Bashar", the son of Saidur Rahman.¹⁵³

Family networks also remain important. JMB leaders realise that loose bonds and weak ideological attachments made its network highly vulnerable to penetration from intelligence agencies, leading to the high rate of arrests. Unmarried *ehsars* are being ordered to marry sisters, daughters or nieces of established and trustworthy JMB members. Family and marriage connections are now prerequisites for moving up the JMB ranks whereas before they were useful but not necessary.

¹⁴³ "Govt finally cracks down on Islamic militants", *The Daily Star*, 24 February 2005.

¹⁴⁴ The South Asian Terrorism Portal provides an up-to-date account of all suspected JMB-related arrests and incidents. See www.satp.org.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Bangladeshi intelligence officials, June 2009.

¹⁴⁶ The export processing zone is a massive industrial zone that allows JMB members to blend in with the half a million garment workers who live in low-cost temporary housing.

¹⁴⁷ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹⁴⁸ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹⁴⁹ The open *da'wah* program of the first six years was replaced by tight *da'wah* cells after the formation of the last shura in November 2008 and then reportedly halted altogether.

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

¹⁵¹ Some of JMB's top leaders came from elite schools: Sunny attended Kushtia's Islamic University; Salahuddin attended Gazipur's Dhaka University of Technology; Mizan and several other JMB members were enrolled at Dhaka Polytechnic Institute; shura member Rafiqul Islam was a student at Rangpur Carmichael College; and KM Wahidul Islam, a suspected suicide squad member, was a student at Jahangirnagar University. Chittagong's operation chief is reportedly also an engineer. For more, see Julfikar Ali Manik and Shariful Islam "Eyes shift to universities", *The Daily Star*, 24 June 2009, and Tipu Sultan "JMB rebuilds by shifting strategy", *Prothom Alo*, 10 January 2009.

¹⁵² "JMB IT 'chief' captured", *The Daily Star*, 23 June 2009.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

JMB has also begun killing former operatives turned informants to limit further defections and harm to the organisation. On 1 February 2010, Rashidul Islam, a former *ehsar* who defected from the JMB over a year ago, was stabbed to death in Dhaka by his former jihadi colleagues.¹⁵⁴ Rashidul, who was the imam of Karaihati Jama Masjid in Gazipur at the time, was apparently killed in response to a sermon he gave in 2009 against the JMB. The police say they have identified the three alleged murderers – Akash, Al Amin and Nadim – with Mizan’s help.¹⁵⁵ The incident has prompted other former JMB cadres to seek police protection – including Akramuzzaman, the former head of the Bangladesh branch of RIHS and formerly one of JMB’s funders. After breaking with JMB in 2008, Akramuzzaman wrote a book that reportedly inspired Rashidul to quit JMB.¹⁵⁶

A new concern is the possibility of radicalisation and recruitment within Bangladesh’s prison system. There are over 150 JMB inmates in the Dhaka Central Jail alone and authorities have largely failed to isolate them from other prisoners.¹⁵⁷ The JMB detainees have reportedly tried to mobilise other inmates for operations from inside prison. On 29 January 2009, for example, JMB inmates attempted to attack a former minister at a ceremony inside the Dhaka Central Jail.¹⁵⁸ A former senior security official downplayed the problem, however, acknowledging that while some cases of radicalisation in prison may have taken place, he did not see it as a serious threat.¹⁵⁹

D. TRAINING

The crackdown forced JMB to make several changes to its training program, but the emphasis appears to remain on the use of explosives, including suicide bombs, and rebuilding the expertise to use them. In the past several years many of JMB’s explosive experts were either killed, arrested or turned government informant, possibly leaving only ten at large.¹⁶⁰ After his arrest, Boma Mizan said JMB had expanded explosives training to four of

its seven operational commands and planned to train another 100 men to make up for the loss of those arrested. Mizan himself gave advanced explosives training to at least one representative from each command.

Mizan also taught his recruits how to make explosive devices such as grenades, belt bombs, flask bombs, book bombs, ceiling-fan bombs, land mines and electronic and non-electronic mines. Most of the materials such as power gels and detonators were smuggled from India, while the rest of the materials, including explosive casings, batteries, timing devices, carbon, urea and chemicals such as potassium chloride, sulphur and nitric acid, were bought in Dhaka.¹⁶¹ Mizan told his interrogators that JMB stored roughly 500 explosives devices in different caches around the country, with a large depot under Najmul in the north west.

A JMB operative explained that some *ehsar* who received advanced explosives and weapons instruction went on to become members of the *fedayeen* suicide squad.¹⁶² Due to the low number of *ehsars*, most of the full-time operatives are required to go through the *fedayeen* training.¹⁶³ They are required to participate in simulated attacks and receive further training in intelligence and ambushing after they have agreed to forsake their families and “earthly ties”.¹⁶⁴ On 13 April 2009, the RAB arrested three suicide bombers in the capital who were planning to attack the Bengali New Year’s celebrations the next day.¹⁶⁵ This brought the number of squad members arrested to nineteen, but officials are still unclear about its total strength. A senior RAB official told reporters he believed that with the arrests, JMB had no suicide squad left.¹⁶⁶

E. FUNDING

Information provided by Boma Mizan suggests JMB continues to find innovative methods to raise funds, although no one knows exactly how much.¹⁶⁷ According

¹⁵⁴ “Ex-JMB man murdered in city”, *The Daily Star*, 1 February 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Shariful Islam, “12 more deserters on JMB hit list”, *The Daily Star*, 3 February 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Kailash Sarkar, “JMB worry at Dhaka Jail”, *The Daily Star*, 1 February 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, January 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Nasrullah and Mollah Omar are dead, Boma Mizan and at least four of the fifteen men he trained have been arrested. Mahmud and Masud have left the organisation to become informants. See Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ The 2005 suicide bombers, such as Ikhtiar al-Hasan Mamun alias Shihab, received this advanced training.

¹⁶⁵ “8 JMB men arrested in city”, *New Nation*, 14 April 2009.

¹⁶⁶ RAB Additional Director General, Colonel Mizanur Rahman Khan, told reporters in December 2009 that, “Information we [RAB] are gathering through our intelligence says that now JMB has no suicide [squad]”. See “JMB now has no suicide squad”, *The Daily Star*, 21 December 2009.

¹⁶⁷ Bangladeshi economist Abul Barakat’s 2004 study suggests that “Islamic fundamentalists” in Bangladesh were annually raising \$200 million from investments and foreign funding. But the study is based on assumptions with no solid data and conflates militant, political and philanthropic groups. Abul Barakat,

to his interrogation statements, separately confirmed by his wife, he received a monthly stipend of around \$450 to conduct explosives training courses, procure bomb-making materials and cover other expenses such as food, clothing, health care and rent for safe houses.¹⁶⁸ He was also paid another \$150 for renting two apartments in the relatively cheap area of Mirpur in Dhaka, which he shared with his wife and children. *Ehsars* who were in Mizan's explosives training program received \$20 a month, but were expected to work on the side to raise more funds and pay for remaining expenses. Most startlingly, however, he revealed that in 2008 alone, he received \$10,000 to buy bomb-making materials.¹⁶⁹ Although Mizan himself did not explain how these funds were raised, arrests made between 2005 and 2009 illuminate some aspects of JMB financing.

1. Domestic funding

Domestic funding dropped sharply after the group stopped enjoying the political patronage of the BNP-Jamaat government. No JMB operative was wealthy enough to donate large sums, and the current shura, around early 2009, curbed the practice of seeking crop donations and levying taxes in rural areas as a way of reducing the risk of information leaking to security agencies from less-committed *sudhis* and *gayeri ehsars*.¹⁷⁰ While collection of *zakat* (alms) and donations of cowhide after the Eid-ul-Azha holiday remains a regular source of income, JMB now depends on a host of legal local investments as well as criminal activities.

For example, JMB invested in several small and medium businesses with money raised in 2004. Several JMB members bought rickshaws, auto-rickshaws and taxis in the capital, with funds raised locally, as well as those from Middle Eastern donors. This revenue has allowed these JMB members living in and around the capital to be self-sufficient, relieving some of the shura's financial burden and freeing up funds for explosives.¹⁷¹ Much larger sums are raised from investments in businesses in the north

west, including several brick kilns in and around Bogra. These businesses also provide regular work and cover for JMB *ehsars*.¹⁷²

2. External funding

A consistent external source of funds has been donations from JMB supporters and former JMB members working in the Middle East. Several arrested JMB leaders have said that senior members send funds home from the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Abdur Rahman told interrogators that his brother, Waliur Rahman, sent money from Saudi Arabia. In the early months of 2009, security agencies found several JMB hideouts in houses owned by expatriates living in Saudi Arabia.¹⁷³ A former *ehsar* said that his recruiter and trainer left the organisation to work in Kuwait, but he still continues to send funds as he feels his family might be threatened if he did not.

JMB has more sophisticated ways of earning money illegally. One of the most profitable is JMB's large-scale *hundi* operation. *Hundi*, known as *hawala* in other parts South Asia and the Middle East, is a traditional form of transferring money, which operates outside of the formal banking sector. *Hundi* operations are difficult to track, especially in Bangladesh, where it likely facilitates at least half of the roughly \$10 billion remitted annually by Bangladeshi workers in the Middle East and South East Asia.¹⁷⁴ JMB's *hundi* operations are profitable and provide a secure method moving its own money. The informal nature of *hundi* has made it extremely difficult to estimate JMB's foreign funding despite the government's efforts to tighten financial controls.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the involvement of banking officials in concealing JMB terrorist financing, although some are behind bars, makes the task even more difficult.¹⁷⁶

JMB has also put its trafficking expertise to good use by continuing arms smuggling across the Indian border, and facilitating an LeT-led counterfeiting ring across South Asia, which also includes HUJI-B.¹⁷⁷ Although Abdur

"Bangladesher Maulbader Aurthaniti" ["Economics of Bangladeshi Fundamentalism"], Dr Abdul Gafur Memorial Lecture, Dhaka University, 21 April 2004.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sharmin, wife of Boma Mizan, Dhaka, 21 May 2009. See also Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Mizan also said that JMB was paying around \$20 a month to each of an estimated 200 *ehsars*, which cost the organisation roughly \$4000 a month. See Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, June 2009.

¹⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, intelligence officer, Dhaka, July 2009 and journalists, Dhaka, April and June 2009. See also Kailash Sarkar, "Some expats in ME fund JMB greatly", *The Daily Star*, 23 February 2009.

¹⁷² Crisis Group interview, JMB member, Bogra, 2009.

¹⁷³ "Some expats in ME fund JMB greatly", op. cit.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bangladesh Bank official, July 2009. See also Rejaul Karim Byron, "Remittance growth beats doom-sayers", *The Daily Star*, 6 July 2009.

¹⁷⁵ For more on this see Section VII.B.3.

¹⁷⁶ "JMB fund link with IBBL," *Bangladesh Observer*, 29 March 2006.

¹⁷⁷ According to a HUJI-B operative, a JMB member named Shafiuddin currently runs the arms smuggling operation. Delhi Police Interrogation statement of HUJI-B operative Anisul Mursalin, New Delhi, 2006. Copy on file with Crisis Group. Mursalin, who is from Faridpur, Bangladesh, was arrested on 26 March 2006 at a New Delhi railway station with three kilo-

Rahman resisted LeT overtures to include the JMB in international militancy, JMB under Saidur Rahman has been more open to it (see next section).¹⁷⁸ The October 2008 arrest of Rafiqul Islam, who was in charge of the Shibanj and Godagari borders with India, revealed that JMB smuggled counterfeit Indian and Pakistani rupees, U.S. dollars and Bangladeshi takas to India across remote border crossings in Rajshahi division. The operations were then conducted by JMB's India wing, possibly by shura member Sayem, who is thought to be hiding there. The counterfeiting operations of Rafiqul's cell contributed around \$720 per month to JMB's central fund, enough to provide \$2,150 to Boma Mizan to purchase explosives in August 2008. He told his interrogators that Saidur Rahman had told the shura it is *jayez* (permissible) to harm the enemy by using their money for jihad.¹⁷⁹

Rafiqul's capture led to the arrest of two supervisors for JMB's counterfeiting operations in Dhaka, Anas Uddin and Aslam Khan and the recovery of tens of thousands of fake notes, as well as counterfeiting plates.¹⁸⁰ The two men revealed that several JMB operatives went to Pakistan to receive training in counterfeiting and obtained counterfeiting machines. Both Aslam and Anas said that JMB's Dhaka operations were linked to an international chain through a man named Mazumdar, who runs counterfeiting operations in India.¹⁸¹ A Bangladeshi named Sarfraz alias Yakub, who has a record of smuggling fake currencies under Mazumdar's supervision, was arrested in Kolkata on 19 December 2008 with \$14,000 worth of bogus Indian rupees.¹⁸²

The fake currency ring was reportedly run by Pakistan's LeT with the help of Dubai-based Indian underworld figure Dawood Ibrahim.¹⁸³ Security agencies arrested Ibrahim's close associate Daud Merchant in Brahmanbaria, 80km north west of Dhaka, on 29 May 2009, while LeT operative Mobassher, who is believed to be high up in the counterfeiting ring, was arrested on 6 January 2009. The arrests have not made a significant dent,

however, in counterfeiting operations and cross-border trafficking, according to regional intelligence officials.¹⁸⁴

F. STRATEGY, TACTICS AND THE 2008 ELECTIONS

JMB's long-term strategy was to carve out a small part of Bangladesh where Islamic law could be applied as the starting point for gradual expansion. Perhaps because of the need for public support for this project, it deliberately avoided attacks aimed at mass casualties. But given JMB's lack of arms, manpower and popular support, the strategy seemed little more than a fantasy, even more so after Boma Mizan revealed details of the plan after his arrest in May 2009. He said that in a series of meetings led by Saidur Rahman in and around Dhaka after August 2008, the shura decided that the JMB would take over a district in the north west, though it is unclear which one.

Before the plan was abandoned, the group intended to garner support from 75 per cent of the chosen district's population through *da'wah* activities. The plan called for concentrating all *da'wah* cells in that district, boosting book, pamphlet, compact disc and leaflet production and holding large-scale *da'wah* meetings. Shura members were ordered to store all grenades, bombs, arms and ammunition in that district until the end of 2009, at which time JMB planned to use the weapons to attack government buildings and military, paramilitary and police installations in the area. The offensive would continue until key government and security installations were under JMB control. The group would then declare an independent district and install Islamic rule. Mizan said JMB would also seek negotiations with the government to cease hostilities if the independent district were left alone.¹⁸⁵

Even before the arrest of Mizan and others, the plan had virtually no chance of success – let alone after the electoral victory of the secular Awami League in December 2008. However, it underscores how JMB remains committed to an Islamic state in Bangladesh, rather than to waging the global jihad. A JMB member said the group would particularly target atheists, apostates, government institutions and officials.¹⁸⁶ Together with Hindus and Awami League supporters, these have been JMB targets from the beginning, and assassinations have been the tactic of choice. In late 2008 before the country's parliamentary elections, JMB operatives planned to try to kill the

grams of high-powered explosives and several weapons. See "Grenade attack on AL rally", *The Daily Star*, 12 June 2006.

¹⁷⁸ For more, see "Fake Currency: the new threat", *India Today*, 16 February 2009.

¹⁷⁹ Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, Task Force for Interrogation statement, May 2009.

¹⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009. For a summary of the arrests in connection with the fake currency ring see Tipu Sultan "Roots of fake currency ring is in Karachi", *Daily Prothom Alo*, 30 January 2010.

¹⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹⁸² Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, April 2009.

¹⁸³ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹⁸⁴ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, September 2009.

¹⁸⁵ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

¹⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, JMB member, 22 May 2009.

two major contenders for national leadership, the BNP's Khaleda Zia and the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina.

The attacks came close to fruition. JMB brought in ten men from its Indian branch in November 2008 for its planned assassination attempt on Zia, but the plan was scrapped after several arrests of high-level JMB operatives in the same month. The group came much closer to assassinating Hasina: the assassin, an operative named Sa'ad, was only metres away from Hasina at an election rally attack.¹⁸⁷ Intelligence tip-offs, however, allowed security agencies to take adequate protective measures and later to arrest several of the plotters.¹⁸⁸

Dhaka is the most likely place for a future attack. In 2008, JMB moved a number of its explosives training facilities, safe houses and meeting places in and around the capital. In a meeting held at a safe house in Dhaka in January 2009, the shura, attended by Saidur Rahman, Shahed, Najmul and Mizan, decided to bring seven or eight JMB families down from the north west to the capital. The household heads would be given jobs, with the families renting out several houses each, to serve as safe houses and explosives and arms storage.

The Awami League's victory in late 2008 disrupted JMB's plans. The new administration's crackdown has pushed JMB into a corner and reportedly dampened its enthusiasm for major operations. But the Awami League's secular policies that seek to diminish the role of religion in politics are likely to drive the JMB leaders who remain at large towards symbolic attacks, similar to the botched attempt on a Bengali New Year's day celebration in April 2009.

VI. LINKS WITH OTHER JIHADI GROUPS

While JMB has shown no interest in the global jihad, it nevertheless maintains contacts with a wide range of local and international jihadi groups. In Bangladesh, this includes HUJI-B; abroad it includes al-Muhajiroun and most importantly, LeT. The LeT's reported plot, uncovered in December 2009, to attack the American embassy and the British and Indian high commissions in Dhaka make this connection all the more dangerous.¹⁸⁹

Abdur Rahman's expulsion from HUJI-B did not preclude later contacts. He reopened communications in 2003 by contacting and then meeting twice with the leader of the radical wing of HUJI-B, Mufti Abdul Hannan. They shared information about upcoming operations, including Hannan's plan to assassinate then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina.¹⁹⁰

One intelligence official said there is some overlap between HUJI-B and JMB operatives, but almost exclusively in the south west, in the greater Faridpur region and Barisal division.¹⁹¹ Fears of migration from the more experienced HUJI-B to JMB have been largely unfounded, with Khalid Saifullah remaining the only case of someone who crossed over from HUJI-B to JMB. JMB's current amir Saidur Rahman, and current HUJI-B militant faction chief Omar reportedly have held regular meetings in order to open new areas of cooperation.¹⁹² So far cooperation has been limited to the LeT-led counterfeiting ring described earlier.

In terms of international contacts, JMB has documented ties to al-Muhajiroun, the jihadi splinter of Hizb ut-Tahrir whose members have been involved in violence, including the 2005 London Underground bombing. In mid-2004, the then Sylhet JMB chief Delwar introduced Abdur Rahman to two British-Bangladeshi men named

¹⁸⁹ In November and December 2009, Bangladeshi authorities arrested several LeT operatives in Dhaka. According to the Bangladeshis, the LeT had begun surveillance of the diplomatic missions and were probably planning suicide car bombings. The cell had been given instructions from the LeT leadership in Pakistan to carry out the attacks. The timing of the attack was set to allow the attackers to flee the country undetected among the relative chaos surrounding *haji*-related travel at the time from Bangladesh to Saudi Arabia. For more on this see Bruce Riedel and Aysha Chowdhry, "The Scariest Terror Plot", *The Daily Beast*, 27 January 2010.

¹⁹⁰ Court deposition of Aatur Rahman Sunny, Sylhet, 12 March 2006 and Task Force for Interrogation statement of Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, March 2006.

¹⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹⁹² Crisis Group interview, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, intelligence official and journalist, Dhaka, August 2009.

¹⁸⁸ Julfikar Ali Manik, "JMB plans to kill, foil polls", *The Daily Star*, 8 June 2008.

Mohammad Habibur Rahman and Sajjad. Habibur later arranged a teleconference between al-Muhajiroun's amir, the Syrian Omar Bakri, and Abdur Rahman, who reportedly asked Bakri to introduce him to the al-Qaeda network. As noted previously, the two men returned in June 2005 at which time they paid £10,000 (\$19,000) for help establishing bases in Bangladesh. Although the two left soon after the 17 August explosions, the two groups remained in contact. In an email exchange with Salahuddin, a JMB shura member at the time, al-Muhajiroun members suggested that JMB "attack various foreign embassies, RAB and ... attack or abduct important foreign nationals".¹⁹³

Another link to the Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain was discovered in March 2009 when Faisal Mostafa, head of Green Crescent, a charity registered with the British Charity Commission, was found to have set up a small-scale ammunition and explosives factory under the guise of an orphanage in the southern district of Bhola, and to have maintained a large arms cache there. The information came from three JMB men arrested shortly before a raid on Faisal's school. Faisal apparently maintained regular contact with Saidur Rahman, who occasionally visited Green Crescent, most recently in December 2008.¹⁹⁴ Soon after finding the ammunition factory, the RAB discovered that JMB had also started to make bullets for AK-47 rifles, although it is not clear that there is any connection between the two operations.

JMB's strongest and most dangerous international link is to the LeT, going back to contacts LeT veteran Abdul Karim Tunda gave Abdur Rahman in Pakistan in 1998.¹⁹⁵ On his first trip there, Rahman visited the headquarters of the then named Markaz ud-Da'wah al Irshad,¹⁹⁶ an LeT front in Lahore where Tunda introduced him to the organisation's amir, Hafeez Saeed.¹⁹⁷ He was then taken to a LeT training facility in Muzaffarabad where he received extensive training in arms, explosives, strategy and counter-intelligence.¹⁹⁸

On his second trip in 2002, he met then acting LeT amir Abdus Salam Batabi and later in Islamabad Shaikh Jamilur Rahman, the amir of an obscure Pakistani militant organisation Tehrik-ul Mujahideen.¹⁹⁹ In both meetings he pleaded for introductions to al-Qaeda but again was turned down. Jamilur Rahman gave him \$1,000 for JMB, however, and another \$1,600 for Tehrik-ul Mujahideen's Bangladeshi representative Abdur Razzak in Natore.

After Abdur Rahman's execution in 2007, LeT reportedly re-established contact with JMB under Saidur Rahman, both to bring it into its counterfeiting operations (along with HUJI-B) and to secure its assistance in using Bangladesh as a transit, training and shelter area for jihadi fighters trying to leave Kashmir.²⁰⁰ In 2008, Abu Yusuf Butt, a Kashmiri militant, was arrested in Dhaka for his role in 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League rally, which killed 24 people and injured 300 more. Butt is reported to have had contact with both JMB and HUJI-B, which does confirm some traffic between Kashmir and Bangladesh.²⁰¹

Cooperation between the LeT and JMB appears to be confined to counterfeiting; no links have been uncovered between the two in the LeT's plot to attack diplomatic missions in Dhaka in late 2009. The plot, however, indicates that the LeT does not view Bangladesh solely as a shelter for foreign jihadists, but also as a target in its own right. Given overlaps in their agendas, cooperation between the JMB and LeT in joint militant operations inside Bangladesh cannot be ruled out.

¹⁹³ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, March 2006.

¹⁹⁴ Shariful Islam, "Faisal's JMB link found in probe", *The Daily Star*, 14 April 2009.

¹⁹⁵ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Abdur Rahman, Dhaka, March 2006.

¹⁹⁶ Markaz ud-Da'wah al Irshad changed its name to Jama'at ud Da'wah after it listed as terrorist organisation by the U.S. state department in 2006.

¹⁹⁷ Rahman's 1998 trip to Lahore was actually on his second attempt to travel to Pakistan. His first attempt was in 1997 when he unsuccessfully tried to cross into Pakistan over land through India. In 1998 he flew via Karachi instead.

¹⁹⁸ Task Force for Interrogation statements of Ataur Rahman Sunny, Dhaka, December 2005 and January 2006.

¹⁹⁹ Abdur Rahman's brother, Waliur, who teaches at Madina University in Saudi Arabia arranged the trip.

²⁰⁰ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Mufti Obaidullah, Dhaka, 2009. Copy on file with Crisis Group.

²⁰¹ Chaitanya Chandra Haider and Kailash Sarkar, "Kashmiri militant Butt admits to Aug 21 role", *The Daily Star*, 7 December 2009.

VII. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The relative success of the most recent crackdown on JMB and other militant groups has demonstrated a stronger commitment by post-BNP governments to counter-terrorism. However, JMB's ability to survive underscores significant challenges to Bangladesh's ability to tackle violent extremists. Politicisation of the security institutions; lack of inter-agency cooperation; a dearth of resources and the complacency of security agencies after successful operations repeatedly undermine a strong and sustained drive to dismantle militant networks. Poor governance is also factor: support for extremism in Bangladesh has as much to do with the deficiencies and self-interested behaviour of the mainstream political parties as it does with the strengths of radical groups.

The military-backed caretaker government (CTG), which took power in January 2007 and ruled for two years, focused on the corruption of a small group of politicians and neglected the country's extremist problems.²⁰² Only after the failure of its high profile anti-corruption drive became evident – and the resurgence of JMB was widely reported – did the CTG launch a new crackdown. To the Awami League's credit, it remained focused on the JMB when elected in December 2008. The current government has invested significant resources in counter-terrorism, helped both by the party's secular foundations and the personal commitment of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, a victim of several terrorist attacks.²⁰³ A Western diplomat who deals specifically with counter-terrorism in Bangladesh said the government was showing a much greater willingness than any of its predecessors to deal with the problem.²⁰⁴

²⁰² The CTG committed almost all security agencies to its anti-corruption drive throughout 2007 and early 2008. In 2007 alone, around 440,000 people were reportedly arrested in the CTG's anti-corruption drive. For more on the CTG government, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°151, *Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh*, 28 April 2008.

²⁰³ Sheikh Hasina was the chief target of the 21 August 2004 grenade attacks. Thirteen grenades were hurled at an Awami League rally in Dhaka killing 24 people, including senior Awami League leaders. HUJI-B leader Mufti Abdul Hannan has reportedly confessed to carrying out the attack under the orders of then BNP's deputy Home Minister Lutfuzzaman Babar. Arrested JMB and HUJI-B operatives have also told interrogators that Awami League leaders and workers are one of their targets because of their secular policies. For more on the 21 August attacks, see *The Daily Star's* topic page available at www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/topic/august-21-grenade-attack.

²⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Dhaka, July 2009.

Sheikh Hasina's good intentions have been undermined by problems with the country's counter-terrorism infrastructure which, at present, is an ad hoc and outdated arrangement of government bodies, intelligence and security agencies. Although the government established the inter-ministerial Anti-Terrorism Committee in April 2009 to oversee counter-terrorism matters, it had accomplished little by early 2010. The Ministry of Home Affairs, which is authorised to direct counter-terrorism policy, has yet to produce any substantive policy on the issue while the RAB, its lead agency on counter-terrorism operations with major successes in pursuing and weakening JMB, continues to be involved in extrajudicial "crossfire" killings.²⁰⁵ The detective branch of the police also has a role to play, but rarely receives official support and little or no cooperation from other agencies. In any case, the police itself is badly in need of reform.²⁰⁶

One of the unintentional effects of sporadic success has been complacency among security officials after key arrests. This has led to senior counter-terrorism officials saying JMB is under control and suggesting that the threat is largely over.²⁰⁷ Political turmoil has repeatedly stalled crackdowns and investigations: the first crackdown on JMB came to a halt when law enforcement agencies were used to quell political unrest between 2006 and 2007, which allowed remaining members to regroup. In February 2009, as the RAB was closing in on the JMB amir, Saidur Rahman, the mutiny at Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) headquarters diverted the government and security agencies' attention.²⁰⁸ As a result, JMB's core leadership remains largely intact.

²⁰⁵ According to Odhikar, a leading Bangladeshi human rights organisation, the RAB is implicated in over 60 extrajudicial killings since the current Awami League government came to power. "Crossfires 2009", Odhikar, December 2009. Crossfire killings are those in which the victim is allegedly killed as a bystander to a gunfight. However, the term often refers to what is believed to be an extrajudicial killing in the custody of government security forces like the RAB. See "Judge, Jury, and Executioner: Torture and Extrajudicial Killings by Bangladesh's Elite Security Force", Human Rights Watch, 14 December 2006.

²⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Dhaka, August 2009.

²⁰⁷ Crisis Group interviews, RAB official, January 2009, former intelligence official, January 2009 and journalist, January 2009.

²⁰⁸ In February a large number of the rank and file of Bangladesh Rifles, the country's border guards under the control of the home ministry, led a murderous uprising against their commanding officers in response to years of low pay and poor working conditions. The mutiny at the Rifles headquarters in downtown Dhaka left more than 75 dead, mostly senior BDR and military officials. For more on the mutiny and impact on security see Crisis Group Report, *Bangladesh: Getting Police Reform on Track*, op. cit.

The inefficiency and corruption of the BDR, the country's border security agency, also undermines counter-terrorism successes. All militant groups, especially JMB, have benefited from porous borders with India and Myanmar, particularly when BDR personnel abandoned their posts for nearly a week during the mutiny.²⁰⁹ JMB has regularly exploited lax border control to smuggle its arms and explosives from across the border, while also using the north-west border as its main channel to smuggle counterfeit currencies to India. Hundreds of JMB operatives, including senior leaders such as Boma Mizan, simply walked across the border during the first crack-down to hide out in India.²¹⁰ The border situation, moreover, seems unlikely to change given that politicians, law-enforcement officials and locals living in the area have strong ties to the smuggling trade.²¹¹

A. LACK OF INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

The security and intelligence apparatus, beset by lack of coordination, resources, political will and weak infrastructure, has significantly weakened operational response. Growing tensions between the incompetent police force, the heavy-handed RAB and the powerful intelligence agencies have resulted in little or no cooperation or coordination.²¹² Although the RAB is part of the police force and answers to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), it comprises mostly military officers. In practice this means that the RAB has a much closer relationship with the army chief than the police. However this does not guarantee close cooperation between the RAB and military. An intelligence official termed coordination between all agencies as "non-existent" and collaboration "impossible".²¹³

One example is an incident on 20 February 2010, when police were displaying four arrested JMB operatives along with a recovered cache of bombs at a press conference in Gazipur. They had not informed the RAB of the raids or arrests and no one trained to defuse bombs was present. The police had kept the explosives within reach of the handcuffed JMB members, allowing one of the mili-

tants to pull the pin on an improvised grenade, injuring twelve people.²¹⁴

A security official said relations between the RAB and police have worsened since the caretaker regime, with the police preferring to run their own operations.²¹⁵ Compounding the problem is Bangladesh's military intelligence agency, the Directorate of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), which often has the last word on counter-terrorism operations. A former RAB official said that some of the jihadis arrested by the RAB were released by the DGFI as part of their own operations. Both agencies should be working towards the same goals, he said, but in practice the DGFI's actions, which often go unexplained, undermine other investigations.²¹⁶

The competition between agencies has produced more arrests. However, many do not receive the follow-up they require while others seem to be made just to boost detention statistics.²¹⁷ For example, the RAB widely circulated news of the arrest of 22 women suspected of being JMB operatives in Barisal on 23 April 2009.²¹⁸ However, it did not publicise their release two days later, when they proved not to be connected to militancy or even Islamist politics.²¹⁹ Once an arrest is publicised, there is no incentive to follow up on cases. For instance, the police arrested JMB's top counterfeiting operators in Dhaka in late 2008. Once they made newspaper headlines, the police dropped the investigation instead of pursuing the very strong leads to others involved in the operation.²²⁰

Territorial disputes also contribute to the failure of security agencies to dismantle JMB from the grassroots. Police in rural areas easily have the deepest access to remote areas where JMB recruitment and training take place. But these poorly resourced, corrupt and often dysfunctional branches of the police force receive little training in counter-terrorism or basic investigation skills. Instead, the Bangladesh government and its major donors often direct training and resources mostly towards the military and military-dominated agencies, such as the RAB, to strengthen their ability to respond to militancy.²²¹ However, as the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan

²⁰⁹ Arrested Indian militant Mufti Obaidullah told his interrogators that Pakistani and Kashmiri militants would cross over to Bangladesh in order to fly to Pakistan, while several Indian militants routinely cross the border into Bangladesh for shelter. Task Force for Interrogation statement of Mufti Obaidullah, Dhaka, 2009.

²¹⁰ Task Force for Interrogation statement of Zahidul Hasan Suman alias Boma Mizan, May 2009.

²¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Dhaka, May 2009.

²¹² Crisis Group interview, RAB official, June 2009.

²¹³ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, June 2009.

²¹⁴ "Handcuffed JMB man blasts grenade at press meet", *The Daily Star*, 21 February 2009.

²¹⁵ Julfikar Ali Manik, "Sheer neglect let it happen", *The Daily Star*, 21 February 2009.

²¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, April 2009.

²¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior police official, Dhaka, January 2009.

²¹⁸ "21 suspected female militants arrested in Barisal", *The Daily Star*, 24 April 2009.

²¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, April 2009.

²²⁰ Crisis Group interview, intelligence official, Dhaka, June 2009.

²²¹ Ibid.

have shown, the police and civilian intelligence agencies are far more appropriate for counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations than a military trained to fight external enemies.²²²

The government has sought to mitigate some of the problems described above by creating a Counter-Terrorism Coordination cell in June 2009. The police have also urged the government to form a Counter-Terrorism Task Force at headquarters, which would allow them to maintain a focus on the JMB and other militants without having to divert funds and personnel from the other parts of an already overstretched and under-resourced force.²²³ However, the RAB and the military are unlikely to support such initiatives if they believe that improvements in the police will erode their stature (on either the national or international stage) or divert resources away from them²²⁴

B. WEAK OVERSIGHT

The government has little or no oversight over educational institutions, NGOs and financial systems, increasing the risks that militant organisations like the JMB pose.

1. Madrasas

Bangladesh has one of the largest madrasa systems in the world with more than six million students enrolled in over 30,000 madrasas. Official statistics show a significant increase in enrolment in the 9,125 government-registered *aliyah* madrasas.²²⁵ There are a further 15,000 private

qawmi madrasas under the private Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasa Education Board and thousands more in Ahle Hadith and other streams that are neither registered nor have their curriculum regulated.²²⁶ Analysts fear that failure to ensure effective oversight permits the growth of Islamic extremism.²²⁷ The concerns are not unfounded: as mentioned, on March 2009 Bangladeshi authorities uncovered jihadi literature, weapons, army uniforms and large quantities of ammunition and explosives stockpiled in an unregistered madrasa in Bhola operated by Green Crescent. The madrasa was also used by JMB as a training camp.²²⁸

The government has since attempted to bring unregistered madrasas under the state's purview and considered, under certain conditions, putting madrasa diplomas on par with those from state-run secondary schools. At present, very few universities or employers give madrasa

eighteenth century curriculum used in a large portion of madrasas in South Asia.

²²⁶Rejaul Karim Byron and Shameem Mahmud, "Madrasas mushroom with state favour", *The Daily Star*, 4 August 2005. See also "Jehadi Terror in Bangladesh", Asian Centre for Human Rights, 7 September 2005. *Qawmi* madrasas offer traditional rather than a modern form of Islamic education. They are private non-governmental institutions, which mostly follow Deobandi traditions and teach the traditional Dars-e Nizami. They have little or no association with the government, and are almost exclusively supported by religious endowments and donations from individuals or local and international Islamic organisations.

²²⁷Crisis Group interviews, intelligence official, Dhaka, August 2009.

²²⁸Julfikar Ali Manik, "Green Crescent ran illegally", *The Daily Star*, 1 April 2009. Bangladeshi police have arrested four men in connection with the incident, including a British chemist, Faisal Mostafa, who they describe as the head of the Green Crescent. The UK Charity Commission's website names him as the charity's chief contact located in Manchester. Mostafa has been tried twice before by British courts on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks in the UK. In 1996 he was arrested and tried for conspiring to detonate a bomb after chemicals, timers and detonators were discovered in his house. He was acquitted after claiming he was writing a book on explosives but found guilty of illegally possessing a firearm. In 2000, he was arrested and charged again with conspiring to detonate a bomb after police discovered a large explosives cache in Birmingham. In 2002, he was acquitted of this charge, but his co-defendant was convicted and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for the same charge. In 2008, he was stopped at Manchester airport as he tried to board a plane to Dhaka with a gas-powered gun. He was sentenced to 56 days in jail, suspended for two years, and 100 hours community service. See Fay Schlesinger, "Police swoop on British man accused of running arms factory 'orphanage' as deadly weapons cache is revealed", *Daily Mail*, 26 March 2009; Helen Carter, "British chemist Faisal Mostafa arrested after raid on orphanage in Bangladesh", *The Guardian*, 26 March 2009; and Maajid Nawaz, "Charity or extremist group?", *The Guardian*, 31 March 2009.

²²²For more information on Afghanistan's and Pakistan's police see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°138, *Reforming Afghanistan's Police*, 30 August 2007, and N°157, *Reforming Pakistan's Police*, 14 July 2008; and Asia Briefing N°85, *Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy*, 18 December 2008.

²²³Mizan Malik, "35,000 police to be appointed over 3 years", *Daily Jugantor*, 19 July 2009.

²²⁴One intelligence official said: "The police simply aren't trained to take on such operations". Crisis Group interview, August 2009. For more on the relationship between the military, RAB and police see Crisis Group Report, *Bangladesh: Getting Police Reform on Track*, op. cit.

²²⁵According to the *Bangladesh Economic Review*, from 2001 to 2005, the number of madrasas increased by 22.22 per cent in comparison to 9.74 per cent growth in general educational institutions. Teachers in schools and colleges increased by 12.27 percent, versus 16.52 percent in the madrasas. The number of students in general educational institutions rose by 8.64 per cent, in madrasas 10.12 per cent. *Aliya* madrasas function under the Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board, an independent body funded by the government, which is responsible for establishing madrasas, assigning teachers and developing curriculums. This system mandates that students be taught modern subjects like English, science, social studies, mathematics, geography, history and a modified version of the Dars-e Nizami, an

diplomas the same weight as those from state schools, effectively barring millions of Bangladeshis from advanced educational and job opportunities. The registration drive has largely failed, however. Very few of the fiercely independent *qawmi* madrasas have agreed to register, including many AHAB institutions, and civil society groups all opposed the move, fearing it would promote Islamisation.²²⁹ As a result, many madrasas remain beyond the reach of the government.

2. NGOs

Similarly, Bangladesh exerts little oversight over the more than 250,000 NGOs registered by the NGO Bureau in the prime minister's office.²³⁰ However, following the Green Crescent revelation, the government is planning to establish an inter-departmental monitoring agency to watch for possible militant links to the NGO community.²³¹ It is critical for the government to ensure that the new body not place undue restrictions on civil society in the name of fighting terrorism. The government should consider empowering the National Human Rights Commission to investigate and publicly report on any allegations of civil rights violations by the new monitoring agency.

3. Bank accounts and money transfers

Although there is little to show for its efforts thus far, Dhaka has taken steps to prevent terrorist financing and other abuses of Bangladesh's financial system. For example, in 2007, with U.S. support, the government established an independent financial intelligence unit (FIU) to collect data on financial crimes as well as an inter-agency financial and economic crimes task force to apprehend persons or organisations involved in criminal activity. In 2008 the CTG amended the Anti-Money Laundering Act and in January 2009, the Awami League passed new anti-terrorism legislation. These laws give the Bangladesh Bank, the central bank, authority to freeze accounts and take other actions to curb criminal activity. The bank has also had some success in reducing the amount of unregulated money coming into Bangladesh by encouraging Bangladeshi expatriates to remit funds through trusted banks rather than the *hundi* system.²³²

These measures, while laudable, are likely to produce few tangible results because of lax enforcement, severe corruption in the bureaucracy and a lack of resources and

political will. The Bangladesh Bank does not have the resources to screen the vast *hundi* operations that cater to the estimated six million Bangladeshi workers overseas.²³³ Financial intelligence remains weak at best, with detained LeT operatives claiming that they have even used formal transfer systems, such as Western Union, to receive funds from Pakistan.²³⁴ These problems are compounded by JMB's transfer of relatively small amounts of money, which are virtually undetectable by the system, but add up over time and augment the group's lethality. Proposals to legalise *hundi*, in a way that would permit greater government oversight, have been blocked by banks, as legalisation would rob them of customer service fees associated with remittances.²³⁵ But without addressing problems with formal and informal banking systems, curbing terrorist financing will be an uphill battle.

²²⁹ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, June 2009.

²³⁰ See Alpha Arzu, "Over 23,000 NGOs' activities unknown", *The Daily Star*, 11 July 2009.

²³¹ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Dhaka, July 2009.

²³² Crisis Group interview, Bangladesh Bank official, July 2009. The bank's efforts have increased remittances by 27 per cent in 2008. See "Remittance growth beats doomsayers", op. cit.

²³³ "Detained Lashkar man new chief", *The Daily Star*, 2 October 2009.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bangladesh Bank official, Dhaka, July 2009.

VIII. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Bangladesh has received generous support for counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation activities from donors, especially the UK and the U.S. Much of this has focused on building the skills of security and law enforcement personnel, but bilateral cooperation in a range of areas including intelligence sharing has also been strengthened. Until recently, cooperation between Dhaka and New Delhi, potentially Bangladesh's most important partner in tackling terrorism, has been poor, but relations have steadily warmed since the Awami League government came to power, and Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in January 2010 could presage significant improvements in the counter-terrorism area.

A. UNITED KINGDOM

Among the relationships Bangladesh maintains with Western countries, the closest is with Britain. London and Dhaka have good working relations on counter-terrorism issues, especially given the interaction between JMB operatives and other extremists and the Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain. The two countries are cooperating closely to monitor the rising numbers of British-born Bangladeshis with suspected jihadist sympathies travelling to Bangladesh, possibly for training. The discovery of the Green Crescent facility in Bhola was a direct result of this cooperation, with British officials providing crucial intelligence on the camp to their Bangladeshi counterparts.²³⁶

In June 2009, London and Dhaka drew even closer with the establishment of the UK-Bangladesh Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism (JWCT), geared toward reviewing and reinforcing ongoing investigations and intelligence cooperation between the two countries' security agencies.²³⁷ The JWCT will complement the main thrust of Britain's counter-terrorism assistance to Bangladesh, which to date has been training security and intelligence personnel, which in the past has included the RAB, in investigation, crisis management, intelligence gathering and human rights.²³⁸

The UK is also working with Bangladesh to improve aviation security, but this endeavour has had little impact due to corruption and the lack of commitment to secu-

urity standards.²³⁹ Other efforts include working with the government and civil society organisations to support indigenous social and cultural counterweights to Islamic radicalisation. For example, alongside economic and health schemes, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) is working to expand a government program to provide vocational training to madrasa students to improve their chances of gaining employment upon graduation.

B. UNITED STATES

The U.S. has committed significant resources to counter-terrorism in Bangladesh. It exerted tremendous pressure on the BNP-led coalition government in late 2005 to take action against JMB and has made counter-terrorism one of its three priority areas.²⁴⁰ Although the two countries do not have a counter-terrorism agreement, the U.S. provides extensive assistance. One of the main areas of cooperation is capacity building through the Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program, which started in 2000 and has trained over 1,000 police officers, largely from Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), in forensics and other skills such as VIP protection, crime scene management and responding to terrorist attacks. It also helped create Bangladesh's first Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team within the DMP.

The U.S. embassy in Dhaka is also proposing to fund a pilot police reform program jointly run by the United States Agency for International Development and the Department of Justice through its International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program. The program will focus on several key areas – including counter-terrorism, human trafficking, community policing and human rights training – and will likely be implemented in several districts in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions on Bangladesh's border with India that have a history of terrorist activity and where police are thinly spread.²⁴¹

A provision in U.S. appropriation legislation known as the Leahy Amendment prevents the U.S. from providing any assistance to the RAB due to its poor human rights record and use of extrajudicial "crossfire" killings.²⁴²

²³⁶ Jeremy Page, Russell Jenkins and Michael Evans, "British-run orphanage in Bangladesh 'is Islamist training camp'", *The Times*, 26 March 2009.

²³⁷ For more information on the UK-Bangladesh Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism see the statement by Lord West GCB DSC, the UK's Minister for Security and Counterterrorism, Dhaka, 28 June 2009 available at <http://ukinbangladesh.fco.gov.uk>.

²³⁸ Crisis Group interview, UK official, Dhaka, January 2009.

²³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Dhaka, July 2009.

²⁴⁰ See Crisis Group Report, *Bangladesh Today*, op. cit.

²⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, Dhaka, January 2009.

²⁴² In March 2007, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions issued a statement stating that the "pattern of incidents would suggest that what the police and special forces report as 'crossfire' deaths are in fact staged extrajudicial executions". See "UN Expert On Extrajudicial Executions Urges Bangladesh to Stop Police From Murdering Suspects", 28 March 2007, available at www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/

However, in 2008 the State Department concluded that human rights improvements made the RAB eligible for human rights training through the Defence Department.²⁴³ The U.S. embassy in Dhaka also maintains an informal dialogue with the RAB to facilitate intelligence sharing and gathering.²⁴⁴

As part of broader counter-terrorism measures, the U.S. is providing training and equipment to Bangladesh to improve border patrols and port security, as well as supporting measures to guard against financial crimes. The U.S. embassy in Dhaka is also backing government efforts to work with over 300,000 imams to address the adverse effects of militancy in their weekly sermons, as well as vocational training for madrasa students who might otherwise join radical organisations. Security officials have expressed some scepticism about these programs, however, because they are not sufficiently targeted at areas known to be centres of militant activity.²⁴⁵

C. INDIA

The Indian government is Bangladesh's most important international partner in combating jihadi extremism. Historically, though, the relationship has been mired in mutual mistrust. Despite undeniable evidence of militants such as the JMB using areas along the India-Bangladesh border to train, Dhaka and New Delhi for years insisted on blaming each other for their respective problems rather than acknowledge their overlapping interest in tackling them. Intermittent firefights between Indian and Bangladeshi border forces exacerbate acrimony between the neighbours and feed conspiratorial views among senior Bangladeshi security officials, some of whom believe that JMB is a proxy for India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).²⁴⁶

However, the relationship between New Delhi and Dhaka has warmed since the Awami League took power in December 2008. Improved cooperation between Indian and

Bangladeshi law enforcement is widely credited for leading to several recent arrests of Dawood Ibrahim crime ring members – one of the largest Indian criminal organisations that is also allegedly responsible for several terrorist attacks in India – and LeT operatives by Bangladesh police's Detective Branch.²⁴⁷ In January 2010, the countries signed a treaty regarding detainee transfers of accused and convicted criminals to stand trial or live out their sentences in their home country.²⁴⁸ The two countries also signed an agreement on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. And in January New Delhi and Dhaka announced the formation of a coordination committee with the representatives from each country's law enforcement agencies and intelligence wings to combat international terrorism, organised crime and the cross-border drug trade. The committee will be constituted under the auspices of each country's home ministry.²⁴⁹

hurricane.nsf/view01/6447F7BFE6FB01B7C12572AC005D9A26?opendocument.

²⁴³ Crisis Group interview, U.S. embassy official, Dhaka, January 2009. The training started in 2009.

²⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, U.S. embassy official, Dhaka, January 2009.

²⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, security officials, Dhaka, August 2009.

²⁴⁶ For example, a senior intelligence official said, "JMB is not patriotic. They are mad men who want to kill everyone. We think it may have been created by the government across the border. So that is why they want to stir up trouble in Bangladesh. At least HUJI is patriotic. They would think twice before trying to assassinate our leaders. More importantly, they have always said they would join us in case of a war against India". Crisis Group interview, Dhaka, July 2009.

²⁴⁷ The Dawood Ibrahim crime syndicate is reported to have 5,000 members and maintain strong links with both LeT and al-Qaeda by sharing its smuggling routes. The group, popularly known as D-Company, is also thought to have had a hand in the 1993 bombings of the Bombay Stock Exchange. For more see "International Terrorism and Transnational Crime: Security Threats, US Policy, and Considerations for Congress", Congressional Research Service, Washington DC, 5 January 2010.

²⁴⁸ The agreement covers only convicted criminals serving prison sentences longer than six months who do not have pending charges against them. Under the agreement detainees have the option to live out their sentence in the country where they were arrested or be transferred to their home country. The treaty does not cover anyone convicted under military law or those with death sentences. See "Bangladesh-India to form body to combat int'l terrorism", *The Daily Star*, 23 January 2010.

²⁴⁹ All the three agreements are pending ratification by Dhaka and New Delhi; either country can withdraw from any of the agreements with six months advance notice.

IX. CONCLUSION

JMB remains dangerous for Bangladesh and more proactive measures are needed to prevent it regrouping. The government should not let its guard down as it attends to other priorities. Despite the arrests made since late 2005 – especially those since October 2008 – JMB continues to actively recruit, train and raise funds. It proved in 2005 that it could survive the elimination of its leadership and heavy losses in its ranks. It can do so again. JMB's current amir, Saidur Rahman, has proven far more elusive than expected, and powerful veterans Najmul and Sohel Mahfuz also remain at large.

JMB has found new and more secure ways to produce fewer, less experienced but more deeply loyal operatives. Links to LeT and British Bangladeshi militants have injected new capabilities and techniques into JMB's repertoire while diversifying its sources of income, training and weapons. A new willingness to discuss greater collaboration with HUJI-B is especially disconcerting given that together, they pose a far more serious threat to Bangladesh than either could do on its own. By contrast, despite the past Jamaat membership of many senior JMB operatives, there has only been negligible evidence of direct Jamaat support for JMB or any other violent militant organisation.

If JMB's strengths are clear, its weaknesses are equally evident, suggesting the government has a good chance now to effectively eradicate the organisation. Passing laws is not enough, however. The government must draw up a clear division of responsibilities for the intelligence, border and security agencies. The planned elite counter-terrorism unit must focus on dismantling JMB and other organisations like HUJI-B without being asked at the same time to quell political unrest or arrest corruption suspects. The biggest danger, in the absence of new attacks, is complacency, and a sense that the problem has already gone away.

Effective counter-terrorism policies require more than just money and guns; improving governance is also necessary. In this regard, Bangladesh needs to focus on the causes of militancy, such as official corruption, blatant disregard for the rule of law and an enduring culture of impunity, which reaches to the highest levels of government. Increasing positive interaction between the state and its citizens at the district and sub-district levels is also crucial. Community policing initiatives, which put police-public partnership at the centre of security, should be expanded. Outreach programs to reduce support for extremism will succeed only if the communities they target see the state as a credible and secure alternative to militancy.

The international community, meanwhile, should continue to support projects that strengthen Bangladesh's democratic institutions and make recruitment by organisations like the JMB less attractive. Donors should also continue to support efforts to weaken the grassroots organisational strength of JMB. The government should also pay particular attention to strengthening cross-border cooperation in counter-terrorism with India.

Security agencies came close to dismantling the JMB once. With a strong political commitment from the centre, the JMB threat can be defused.

Dhaka/Brussels, 1 March 2010

APPENDIX A

MAP OF BANGLADESH

