

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On June 10, 2020, reports surfaced that al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has intensified its propaganda and recruitment materials online to influence Bangladeshi nationals to launch lone wolf attacks against the Indian government, its security agencies, Hindutva leaders, and a “certain category of persons.” According to reports, AQIS recruited a team of Bangladeshi Islamic clerics and scholars to create persuasive online recruiting content. The online material allegedly contains detailed strategies on how to plan and execute attacks in the name of the global jihad. (Source: [Times Now News](#) [1])

On January 25, 2020, two Bangladeshi nationals were charged by India’s National Investigation Agency (NIA) in a Mizoram special court. The charges alleged the suspects entered India with the intention of carrying out terrorist attacks. The two men, Mahmud Hassan and Mohamad Sa’ad Hussain are members of Ansar al Islam, a proscribed terrorist group in Bangladesh. The two entered India illegally in November 2018 and spent the next nine months scouting potential locations for attacks. The suspects were originally arrested in July 2019 where, upon being unable to provide valid identity documents, were detained due to suspicious activity in Mizoram. The charges against the suspects also alleged that the two tried to procure weapons to carry out terrorist attacks under the orders from their handlers in Bangladesh. (Source: [Hindustan Times](#) [2])

Overview

Bangladesh—a secular, Muslim-majority country—has struggled with violent Islamist groups since the country fought an eight-month war for independence from West Pakistan in 1971. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [3])

Bangladesh—previously known as East Pakistan—was linguistically and culturally distinct from West Pakistan (now Pakistan). Bangladeshi secularists at the time agitated for greater independence, while the Islamists—led by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) party—aggressively fought fellow Bangladeshis with the support of the Pakistani military. The JeI is believed to have committed serious war crimes during the war for independence in 1971, and has since continued to use militant groups to commit violence in the country and disrupt the secular government. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [4], [U.S. Department of State](#) [3])

Today, domestic Islamist extremist groups like [al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent](#) [5] (AQIS)—as well as pro-[ISIS](#) [6] supporters—are believed to use domestic terror affiliates to spread propaganda online and on the streets of Bangladesh as well as recruit foreign fighters and launch domestic attacks. Since 2013, a variety of local Islamist groups are believed to be responsible for the murders of at least 40 pro-secular writers and activists, members of religious minorities, and foreigners. Among those killed in 2016 were U.S. embassy employee and LGBT activist Xulhaz Mannan, secular English professor Rezaul Karim Siddique, and law student Nazimuddin Samad. Among those killed in 2015 were bloggers Avijit Roy and Washiqur Rahman, liberal professors Mohammad Shakil Auj and Shafiul Islam, and secular books publisher Faisal Arefin Dipon. (Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [7], [BBC News](#) [8], [NTVBD](#) [9], [SITE Intelligence](#) [10], [CNN](#) [11], [BBC News](#) [12], [Reuters](#) [13], [East Asia Forum](#) [14], [Guardian](#) [15], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [16], [NPR](#) [17], [Reuters](#) [18])

Bangladesh is also host to a number of Islamist political parties and organizations, including banned groups JeI and [Hizb ut-Tahrir](#) [19] (HT). While some previous Bangladeshi administrations have made concessions to Islamist organizations in an attempt to win their support, the current government under Sheikh Hasina Wazed has cracked down on Islamist outfits. Beginning in 2013, Hasina inaugurated a new court to arrest and prosecute members of the JeI, which was reportedly responsible for war crimes during the time of the country’s independence in 1971. Since then, the Hasina government has sentenced a number of these men to death. Since the July 2016 Dhaka attack, Bangladeshi security forces have also cracked down on Islamist militants. Police have conducted a series of raids on suspect extremist hideouts in Bangladesh, collectively killing around 50 militants. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [20], [Combatting Terrorism Center](#) [21], [Indian Express](#) [22], [Astro Awani](#) [23])

In the government’s efforts to crack down on Islamist activity, Bangladesh has increased its cooperation with India and the United States. Conversely, ties with Pakistan remain strained due to its suspected tolerance of individuals with ties to Bangladeshi extremism. For example, in December 2015, a Pakistani diplomat was asked to leave Bangladesh after she was accused of smuggling money into the country to benefit extremists. (Sources: [Dawn](#) [24], [Indian Express](#) [25])

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Radicalization

Bangladesh is not a major source of foreign fighters. As of October 2015, fewer than 40 Bangladeshis were believed to have joined or attempted to join ISIS in the Middle East. Instead, Bangladeshi Islamist groups primarily recruit members to engage in local Islamist activity or domestic attacks. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [26], [Stratfor](#) [27], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [28])

The unifying aim of Islamist organizations in Bangladesh is to establish a state ruled by sharia (Islamic law). While Islamist organizations like HT focus on establishing Islamic law in Bangladesh under the country's current borders, other groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS aspire to establish a broader South Asian caliphate. The idea of a South Asian caliphate itself appears to be drawn from a much debated hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) known as Ghazwa-e-Hind. According to some interpretations, Ghazwa-e-Hind envisions a unified region—including modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, India, and Bangladesh—under Islamic law. (Sources: [Hudson Institute](#) [29], [Indian Defense Review](#) [30], [MEMRI Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor](#) [31])

In recent years, the number of suspected Islamist attacks has increased. Attacks have also apparently become more indiscriminate, with assailants targeting not only individuals accused of speaking out against Islam, but also religious minorities and foreigners. Transnational militant groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda have also reportedly linked up with local groups—Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh and Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), respectively—to carry out attacks. (Sources: [Hudson Institute](#) [29], [CNN](#) [32])

In a January 2017 essay, an academic at Bangladesh's North South University attributed the country's growing ranks of young extremists to three factors: a demographic youth bulge, a changing social landscape characterized by rapid urbanization and digitization, and a lack of democracy. Defeating extremism in Bangladesh, he said, will require exposing youths to means of political expression, economic opportunity, and launching "a massive online campaign to deter extremist propaganda." Other analysts agree that defeating extremism in Bangladesh depends, in part, on "equipping credible messengers to challenge extremist narratives online." (Source: [Conversation](#) [33], [Religion and Geopolitics Online](#) [34])

Terrorist Organizations

ISIS and al-Qaeda both claim a presence in Bangladesh, and are believed to be cooperating with local terror groups in order to recruit and carry out domestic attacks. Local terror groups operating in Bangladesh include the ISIS-affiliated JMB, a Bangladeshi terror group founded in 1998, as well as the al-Qaeda affiliated Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), formed in 2007.

ISIS

[ISIS](#) [6] formally announced its presence in Bangladesh in the November 2015 issue of *Dabiq*, its online English-language magazine. The issue included an interview with Sheikh Abu al-Hanif, purportedly the head of ISIS operations in Bangladesh. (Source: [Dabiq](#) [35])

In the article, "The Revival of Jihad in Bengal," Hanif lauded Bangladesh's JMB terror group for its ability to resist "the effect of both European colonization and Hindu cultural invasion." The article also referenced the murder of an Italian aid worker and a Japanese citizen in September and October 2015, respectively, calling the murders "blessed back-to-back attacks" which "caused havoc among the citizens of the crusader nations and their allies" and "forced their diplomats, tourists, and expats to... live in a constant state of fear." (Sources: [Dabiq](#) [35], [New York Times](#) [36], [Al Jazeera](#) [37])

Although ISIS formally introduced its Bangladeshi operation in November of 2015, the group had been working to lure Bangladeshi citizens to its cause since 2014. In August of 2014, ISIS released a Bengali-language video showing various individuals pledging their support for the so-called caliphate. The following month, 24-year-old British citizen Samiun Rahman was arrested in the capital city of Dhaka, one of multiple British-born individuals reportedly recruiting for ISIS in Bangladesh. In 2015, another nine individuals were arrested in Bangladesh and accused of planning the overthrow of the

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

government in order to establish a caliphate. (Sources: [Dhaka Tribune](#) [38], [Telegraph](#) [39])

In 2014, authorities arrested Hifzur Rahman, a student member of the ISIS-affiliated JMB. Though ISIS had not formally announced its Bangladeshi presence in 2014, Rahman said he was affiliated with ISIS and was attempting to recruit foreign fighters across the country on behalf of the global terror group, particularly from the northern Bangladeshi district of Sylhet. Rahman also reportedly claimed that ISIS was recruiting online via a Facebook page titled “ISIS Bangladesh.” (Source: [Jamestown Foundation](#) [40])

Despite the arrests of individuals who were—according to media reports—affiliated with ISIS, the government has repeatedly denied that ISIS maintains a formal presence in the country. When questioned by the media after the restaurant hostage crisis on July 2, 2016, Bangladesh’s Information Minister, Hasanul Haq Inu, blamed local actors, stating, “The answer is very simple, the producer is the BNP [Bangladesh National Party]. The Director is J[e]I. The small actors on the ground are ABT, JMB, and other militant Islamist networks.” (Sources: [Telegraph](#) [39], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [16])

Jamaat-ul-Mujahideenn Bangladesh

Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) is a violent Islamist group affiliated with ISIS. Founded by Abdur Rahman in 1998, the group seeks to establish a Bangladeshi state governed by Islamic law. The group was formally banned in 2005, and its leader hanged in 2007 after being found guilty for the murder of two judges in Dhaka. The Bangladeshi government has accordingly cracked down on the group, reportedly arresting and even killing dozens of its members, including its former leader, Tamim Chowdhury. Despite the ban and crackdown, JMB is believed to remain active within Bangladesh and is known to have coordinated with ISIS. (Sources: [CNN](#) [41], [Asia News](#) [42], [Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium](#) [43], [West Point Combating Terrorism Center](#) [44], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [45], [Independent](#) [46])

Before the JMB linked up with ISIS, one of the group’s most notorious acts of terror occurred on August 17, 2005, when JMB members detonated 459 bombs in 63 of Bangladesh’s 64 districts, killing two people and wounding more than 100 others. (Sources: [National Interest](#) [47], [Deutsche Welle](#) [48])

Investigations immediately after the August 2005 JMB attack resulted in more than 700 arrests of JMB members or members of its affiliate, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB). JMB leaders Siddique ul-Islam and Shaykh Abdur Rahman were held responsible for organizing the attacks. Both were captured in March 2006 and executed on March 30, 2007. After further investigations, law enforcement officials stated that the JMB had more than 8,000 members or sympathizers in Bangladesh, including a suicide squad of 2,000 individuals. (Source: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [44])

Since the 2005 attack, JMB members have continued to be implicated in domestic terror attacks. In 2007, another six JMB members were executed on charges of killing two Bangladeshi judges. JMB also took credit for the October 2015 murder of a Japanese citizen. Arrests of JMB members are ongoing. In June 2016, three JMB members were arrested as part of a national raid on Islamist militants. On February 28, 2017, five JMB militants were sentenced to death for the October 2015 murder. (Source: [Fox News](#) [49], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [44], [National Interest](#) [47], [Deutsche Welle](#) [48], [PTI](#) [50])

JMB’s reported connections to the JeI political party raises further concern. On November 26, 2015, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam stated, “At least one-fourth of banned militant outfit JMB members are former Jamaat-e-Islami members and are now involved in acts of destruction across the country.” Islam went on to say that “new members are also reportedly financing JMB’s terror and criminal acts” and that “JMB members are using the money to buy motorcycles, explosives and ammunition to commit crimes.” (Source: [Eurasia Review](#) [51])

According to reports, JMB members have also coordinated with the Pakistani-based terror group [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#) [52] (LeT). Reports indicate that JMB members have moved from Bangladesh into Pakistan in order to receive LeT training. Bangladeshis also have a history of supporting al-Qaeda, a history which dates back to 1998, when the leader of Bangladesh’s Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami (HuJI) included his signature in Osama Bin Laden’s second anti-West fatwa. On December 2, 2016, Bangladesh’s highest court upheld the death sentence given to HuJI leader Abdul Hannan and two associates for a 2004 attack on the British ambassador that left three people dead. Hannan is believed to have left Bangladesh in the 1980s to study at a madrassa in Pakistan and later to have fought in the Afghan war. He has been linked to at least two other deadly attacks in Bangladesh since 2001. (Sources: [Diplomat](#) [53], [Stratfor](#) [27], [Christian Science Monitor](#) [54], [Stanford University](#) [55], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [56], [Daily Mail](#) [57])

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

Following the 2016 attack on a Dhaka café, security and law enforcement officials have started to refer to a new group called “neo-Jamaat-ul Mujahideen” (Neo-JMB). Neo-JMB is a JMB splinter group that also calls itself the Islamic State-Bangladesh, and has previously been accused of transporting fighters into Iraq and Syria. JMB’s emir Salahuddin Ahmed, does not recognize the group. Neo-JMB was thought to be founded by Tamim Chowdhury, a Canadian-Bangladeshi accused of being the primary coordinator between ISIS and Bangladeshi jihadist groups. Each faction of Neo-JMB is purportedly led by a regional commander who follows orders from the central leadership. According to International Crisis Group, Neo-JMB has mostly dismantled following the death of Chowdhury in August 2016. However, smaller cells continue to carry out a small number of operations throughout the country. (Sources: [International Crisis Group](#) [58], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [59])

It is reported that Saifullah Ozaki, a Bangladeshi professor who previously taught in Kyoto, was the subsequent leader of Neo-JMB. Ozaki is alleged to have played a key role in the online recruitment of Bangladeshis to ISIS and facilitating their transportation to fight in Syria. Additionally, it is reported Ozaki recruited many of the assailants of the 2016 Dhaka café attack. According to Bangladesh Intelligence officials in November 2019, Ozaki is currently being held in jail in Iraqi Kurdistan after surrendering during a military operation against ISIS in Syria in early 2019. (Sources: [International Crisis Group](#) [58], [Kyodo News](#) [60])

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent

[Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent](#) [5] (AQIS) is [al-Qaeda](#) [61]’s fifth official branch. The group was founded in September 2014 at the behest of al-Qaeda leader [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#) [62], who appointed [Asim Omar](#) [63] as emir (commander or prince) of the new affiliate. Like its parent group, AQIS seeks to wage jihad in order to establish governance by Islamic law. The affiliate allegedly operates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Burma, Bangladesh, and Kashmir. Zawahiri stated that AQIS seeks to “rescue” the subcontinent’s Muslim population from “injustice, oppression, persecution, and suffering.” In Bangladesh, AQIS reportedly operates with local terror group ABT. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [64], [Long War Journal](#) [65], [CNN](#) [41])

AQIS was formed after a two-year effort to consolidate jihadist factions on the Indian subcontinent, according to Zawahiri, who announced the affiliate’s creation in a video dated September 3, 2014. Included in the new group’s ranks are Taliban fighters loyal to both Zawahiri and the leadership of the Taliban in Afghanistan. (Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [65], [Independent](#) [66], [Reuters](#) [67])

Analysts generally believe that Zawahiri created AQIS in order to steal the limelight from an expanding ISIS and therefore promote al-Qaeda’s brand. The Diplomat’s Jordan Olmstead asserts that “AQIS isn’t about India—it’s about preserving al-Qaeda’s safe havens in Pakistan and Afghanistan,” especially amid rivalries with ISIS and the Pakistani army for influence and control over the Af-Pak region. Flashpoint Global Partners senior analyst Laith Alkhouri called the group’s formation “a serious counternarrative to the ISIS expansion.” (Sources: [Diplomat](#) [68], [New York Times](#) [64])

However, an unnamed jihadist close to AQIS told Reuters, “After the killing of Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda’s new chief al-Zawahiri started the reorganization of al Qaeda, with its main focus on South Asia.” Sources close to AQIS emir Asim Omar told Reuters that Omar has eyed the Indian subcontinent for many years, and has released videos propagandizing to Kashmiri Muslims in a hope to recruit them to fight the secular governments. (Source: [Reuters](#) [69])

AQIS has claimed responsibility for the murders of a number of secular activists. For example, in May 2015, the group murdered atheist bloggers Avijit Roy and Washiqur Rahman in Bangladesh and liberal professors Mohammad Shakil Auj and Shafiul Islam in Pakistan. In October 2015, AQIS’s Bangladeshi branch, known as Ansar al Islam, claimed responsibility for the killing of Faisal Arefin Dipon, a Bangladeshi publisher of secular books. Another publisher, Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, was also targeted but not killed. In April 2016, Ansar al Islam claimed responsibility for the murders of secular campaigner Nazimuddin Samad, and the editors of an LGBT magazine, Xulhaz Mannan and Tanay Mojumdar. In March 2017, the Bangladeshi government banned Ansar al Islam. The Public Security Division of the Home Ministry stated, “The activities of Ansar al-Islam threaten peace and stability in Bangladesh. All activities of this group stand banned because they constitute a threat to public order.” (Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [7], [BBC News](#) [8], [NTVBD](#) [9], [SITE Intelligence](#) [10], [CNN](#) [11], [bdnews24.com](#) [70])

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Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

Bangladeshi nationals to launch lone wolf attacks against the Indian government, its security agencies, Hindu nationalist leaders, and a “certain category of persons.” According to reports, AQIS recruited a team of Bangladeshi Islamic clerics and scholars to create persuasive online recruiting content. The online material allegedly contains detailed strategies to plan and execute attacks in the name of the global jihad. (Source: [Times Now News](#) [1])

Ansarullah Bangla Team

Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) was formed in 2007, and is currently affiliated with al-Qaeda’s local affiliate, AQIS. The group has been banned since 2015, but has nonetheless claimed responsibility for at least seven murders of liberal writers, academics, and bloggers. Three of the claimed victims—Avijit Roy, Anant Bijoy Das, and Washiqur Rahman—reportedly became ABT targets due to their criticism of fundamentalist Islam. (Sources: [Global Security](#) [71], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [72], [CNN](#) [41])

ABT spreads pro-ISIS and pro-al-Qaeda material both in person and online. According to reports, the group has previously uploaded Bengali-language versions of ISIS’s *Dabiq* magazine and al-Qaeda’s *Inspire*. Videos reportedly uploaded by ABT have included explicit references to potential targets, including Bangladesh’s parliament building. The group has also reportedly published videos with bomb-making instructions. (Sources: [Global Security](#) [71], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [73])

Since its ban in 2015, a number of ABT members have been arrested on murder-related charges. ABT cleric Jasimuddin Rahmani was one of seven defendants found guilty in December 2015 of the murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider. Accused ABT members have also been arrested for links to the murder of liberal blogger Niloy Neel. At least one ABT member was reportedly arrested on undisclosed charges after carrying out pro-ISIS recruitment in the country. On June 16, 2016, police arrested Islamist militant Suman Hossain Patowari who, they said, admitted to participating in a hacking attack on publisher Ahmedur Rashid Tutul and two associates in October 2015. Police said that Patowari belonged to ABT and that Ansar al-Islam and ABT “are the same people” but that neither group has proven links to al-Qaeda. (Sources: [CNN](#) [74], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [75], [Wall Street Journal](#) [76], [East Asia Forum](#) [14], [Daily Mail](#) [77])

On December 31, 2015, Bangladeshi authorities found Rahmani guilty of inspiring Haider’s murder. He was sentenced to five years in prison. On December 11, 2017, Bangladeshi immigrant Akayed Ullah allegedly attempted to set off a suicide bomb in the New York City subway system. The bomb failed to detonate properly and police arrested Ullah. According to authorities and Ullah’s family, Ullah was radicalized in part by listening to Rahmani’s sermons and reading his writings. (Sources: [Daily Star](#) [78], [New York Times](#) [79])

Islamist Parties and Organizations

Bangladesh is home to a number of banned Islamist organizations, including HT and the JeI. The country has also been home to a coalition of Islamist organizations known as Hefazat-e-Islam.

Jamaat-e-Islami

Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) is a banned Islamist party that has been linked to numerous terrorist attacks and war crimes in Bangladesh. The party itself predates the country’s independence. The JeI originated as a political movement in South Asia at a time when much of the region was a British colony. Seeking to protect Muslims from discrimination, Muslim nationalists advocated for a separate nation for Muslims under Islamic law. As a result, when Hindu-majority India gained independence in August 1947, East and West Pakistan also gained independence, as one non-contiguous, Muslim-majority country. During the subsequent two decades, East Pakistan agitated for independence due to issues born from cultural and linguistic differences between East and West Pakistan. An eight-month war ensued between the two states in 1971, resulting in East Pakistan’s independence and its name-change to Bangladesh. West Pakistan became what we now know as Pakistan. (Source: [Indian Express](#) [80])

The war that preceded Bangladesh’s independence was fraught with violence. With the purported help of the Pakistani military, members of the JeI were accused of raping and murdering hundreds of people in an effort to prevent the state from becoming independent. (Source: [Indian Express](#) [80])

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

Following the war, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (father of current Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina) established the first independent government, as well as the secular Awami League political party and banned the use of religion in politics. The JeI was consequently no longer recognized as a legal political party. In 1979, however, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came into power and lifted the ban, reintroducing the JeI into Bangladeshi politics. (Source: [Indian Express](#) [80])

Since its reinstatement in 1979, the JeI has remained active as a political party, often aligning itself with the BNP. In that time, members known to be associated with the JeI have held various offices in government, including cabinet positions. (Sources: [Diplomat](#) [81], [Indian Express](#) [80])

In 1996 and again in 2008, the secular Awami League came into power, led by Sheikh Hasina. Following her return to power in 2008, Hasina promised prosecutions against those who had committed war crimes in 1971, including JeI leadership. In 2009, Hasina's government accordingly established the International War Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in Bangladesh. The government has since carried out numerous trials of JeI members, convicting many and sentencing several to death. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [82], [Diplomat](#) [81], [Indian Express](#) [80], [Eurasia Review](#) [51])

With the uptick in violent Islamist attacks since 2013, and the JeI's reported connections to militant groups, the JeI has continued to be excluded from political affairs. In April 2016, the country's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shahriar Alam, advocated for a permanent ban on the group, calling the JeI a "full-terrorist organisation" and saying that as such, the group should not "be allowed to conduct normal political activities in the country." The group is linked to terrorist attacks by the banned JMB terror group, affiliated with ISIS. (Sources: [Hindu](#) [83], [Eurasia Review](#) [51])

The JeI's student wing—the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS)—has also been implicated for links to terrorist violence. From 2013 to 2014, the Bangladeshi government arrested nearly 6,000 JeI members and students from ICS. Despite these arrests, the ICS is not banned in Bangladesh. (Sources: [News Bangladesh](#) [84], [South Asian Terrorism Portal](#) [85], [Diplomat](#) [81], [Indian Express](#) [80], [Eurasia Review](#) [51], [India Times](#) [86])

Hefazat-e-Islam

Hefazat-e-Islam (HeI) is a coalition of about a dozen Islamist groups that formed in 2010 to protest against secularism and women's rights. (Source: [BBC News](#) [87])

Led by elderly cleric Shah Ahmad Shafi, the group is perhaps best known for its 2013 Dhaka demonstration, in which HeI gathered approximately 500,000 people in support of its list of demands, including the death penalty for so-called blasphemers and the demand that certain Muslim minority groups in Bangladesh—like the Ahmadis—be declared non-Muslim. (Source: [BBC News](#) [87])

As part of the demonstration, HeI also denounced "foreign cultural influence" in the country, which the group blames for the purportedly undesirable "free-mixing of men and women." Among the groups that supported HeI was the banned JeI party, which asserted that "the country's Islam-loving people have become united against the anti-Islamic government and its patronized atheist people." (Sources: [BBC News](#) [87], [Guardian](#) [88], [Jamaat-e-Islami](#) [89])

HeI's leader has a reportedly broad influence in Bangladesh, heading the Bangladeshi Qaumi Madrassah Education Board, which runs more than 25,000 madrassas nationwide. According to reports, many of the madrassas under Shafi's purview teach a fundamentalist and Islamist interpretation of Islam, and advocate for Islamic law in Bangladesh. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [87], [Al Jazeera](#) [90])

Despite being marginalized by the Hasina administration, HeI is believed to have the support of some government-affiliated agencies. According to reports, the Bangladesh Railway offered HeI 40 acres of land in Chittagong in 2015. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [87], [Al Jazeera](#) [90], [Hindu BusinessLine](#) [91])

Hizb ut-Tahrir

[Hizb ut-Tahrir](#) [92] (HT) is a global Islamist movement that purports to be non-violent, but which is perceived by some analysts as a "conveyor belt" for Islamist violence. In Bangladesh, the group recruits online and in person, handing out

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

leaflets and organizing events at local universities in an effort to attract new members. (Source: [Hudson Institute](#) [93])

HT was banned in Bangladesh in 2009. Since then, the group has continued to operate, with local law enforcement arresting approximately 600 HT members since the group's ban in 2009. On September 4, 2015, Bangladeshi law enforcement monitored an online HT conference, which was virtually attended by as many as 10,000 men and women. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [94], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [95])

Since its ban in 2009, HT has also been implicated in several violent attacks. Along with other Islamist groups, HT was implicated in connection to the failed 2011 coup attempt led by Major Syed Md Ziaul Haque. In another HT-related incident following the 2009 ban, suspected HT member Farabi Shafiur Rahman was believed to be behind the March 2015 hacking murder of secular blogger Avijit Roy. (Sources: [Hindu BusinessLine](#) [91], [Hudson Institute](#) [93], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [95], [Telegraph India](#) [96], [Guardian](#) [94])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

July 2016 Hostage Crisis

On the evening of July 1, 2016, five Islamist militants stormed into Holey Artisan Bakery, an upscale restaurant in the Gulshan neighborhood of Dhaka, and detonated explosives before separating the Muslim and local Bangladeshi hostages from the non-Muslims and foreigners. After a 12-hour siege, Bangladeshi security forces stormed the restaurant in the early hours of July 2 and freed 13 hostages. The officials found 20 hostages hacked and stabbed to death, including Italian, Japanese, Indian, and U.S. citizens. Four militants and two police officers were killed over the course of the incident, and one militant was arrested. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [97], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [98], [CNN](#) [99], [BBC News](#) [100], [BBC News](#) [101])

The July 1 restaurant attack is reportedly the 24th ISIS attack in Bangladesh since September 2015, and the most deadly in a spate of terror attacks in Bangladesh this year. Some U.S. officials claimed that the assault bore the hallmark of al-Qaeda's regional affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. In October 2016, ISIS released an online article providing a detailed narrative of the attack in its *Rumiyah* magazine. The article—claimed to be penned by ISIS's deceased leader in Bangladesh—referred to the assailants as “five shahadah knights” and the bakery as a “Crusader-owned restaurant.” (Sources: [Guardian](#) [15], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [16], [NPR](#) [17], [Times of India](#) [102], [CNN](#) [103], [Hindu BusinessLine](#) [104], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [98], [Reuters](#) [105], [Rumiyah](#) [106])

On March 2, 2017, Bangladeshi police arrested the head of a militant Islamic group believed to be responsible for inspiring the perpetrators of the July 2016 Dhaka attack. Shaikh Mohammad Abul Kashem, who founded an offshoot of the larger JMB group, is said to have worked alongside the two men accused of masterminding the attack. (Source: [Reuters](#) [18])

Murders of Secular Bloggers and Activists

Since 2013, assailants—often operating on behalf of local al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates—have murdered dozens of activists, secular bloggers, religious minorities, and foreigners. Many of these attacks have been carried out by machete or other sharp weapons, according to police and witness accounts. In some cases, assailants are believed to have used guns to murder their targets. (Sources: [CNN](#) [103], [Guardian](#) [107], [VICE News](#) [108], [New York Times](#) [109])

The first such murder dates back to February 2013, when assailants killed Bangladeshi blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider. At the time, Haider had been covering the Shahbag protests, wherein an estimated 100,000-500,000 Bangladeshis gathered in Dhaka's Shahbag square to call for the death sentence for Abdul Quader Molla, an Islamist war criminal and former member of the JeI party. On February 15, 2013, Haider—who was known to criticize Islam under the pen name Thaba Baba—was found murdered near his home in Dhaka, his body littered by machete wounds, according to Bangladeshi police. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [107], [Guardian](#) [110])

On February 20, 2017, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police counterterrorism unit arrested 34-year-old Redwanul Azad Rana, a former student at the country's top North South University and an alleged accomplice in connection to Haider's murder. Rana had been sentenced to death in absentia in connection to the murder. (Source: [Indian Express](#) [111])

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

Since the Shahbag protests, the country has witnessed dozens of murders targeting secular bloggers, activists, religious minorities, and foreigners. In September 2015, the AQIS-affiliated ABT group issued a hit list on secular bloggers, writers, and activists, which included both domestic and foreign-based targets, including nine bloggers based in the United Kingdom, seven in Germany, two in the United States, one in Canada, and one in Sweden. (Source: [Guardian](#) [112])

Since January 2015, police say there have been more than 40 such murders. In 2016 alone, several high-profile murders were claimed by al-Qaeda or ISIS. These include the July 1 murder of Hindu priest Shyamanondo Das, the April 25 murders of U.S. embassy employee and LGBT activist Xulhaz Mannan and his colleague Mahbub Tonoy, and the May 6 murder of Sufi leader Mohammad Shahidullah, among others. In addition to the spate of hacking murders, the country has also experienced a series of bomb, hostage, and other terrorist attacks, often carried out by local terror groups claiming affiliation with al-Qaeda or ISIS. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [15], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [16], [NPR](#) [17], [CNN](#) [11], [Guardian](#) [113], [BBC News](#) [114], [Guardian](#) [112])

- **January 25, 2020:**India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) submits a charge sheet against two Bangladeshi nationals in a Mizoram special court.
The charges allege the suspects entered India with the intention of carrying out terrorist attacks. The two men, Mahmud Hassan and Mohamad Sa'ad Hussain are members of Ansar al Islam. The suspects were originally arrested in July 2019. The two entered India illegally in November 2018 and spent the next nine months scouting potential locations for attacks. Source: [Hindustan Times](#) [2]
- **November 27, 2019:**A Bangladeshi court sentences seven ISIS members to death due to their role in planning the 2016 attack at a Dhaka café.
The attack killed over 24 people, including both Bangladeshis and foreigners. Source: [New York Times](#) [115]
- **July 9, 2019:**India's National Investigating Agency (NIA) arrests three members of JMB in Karnataka.
The suspects were allegedly plotting to bomb several places in Karnataka with IEDs that they had been hoarding. Source: [OpIndia](#) [116]
- **June 6, 2019 - June 7, 2019:**On June 6, Ashiqul Alam, a green-card holder from Bangladesh, is arrested in Queens, New York, following an elaborate law-enforcement surveillance operation.
The next day, Alam is charged with buying illegal guns in an attempt to carry out a terrorist attack against law enforcement officers and civilians in New York City's Time Square. Prior to his arrest, Alam communicated with an undercover cop who he believed was planning the attack with him. Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [117], [New York Times](#) [118]
- **May 17, 2019 - May 30, 2019:**Within two weeks, Malaysian authorities arrest three suspected members of ISIS, including a Bangladeshi mechanical assistant in Kedah state.
He is suspected of supporting the Bangladeshi arm of ISIS. The suspect allegedly has the ability to assemble improvised explosive devices. Source: [South Morning China Post](#) [119]
- **June 11, 2018:**Suspected militants associated with JMB murder Shajahan Bachchu, a secularist writer and political activist in Munshiganj.
Three suspects, whose names have yet to be released, are later arrested. Source: [Dhaka Tribune](#) [120]
- **March 3, 2018:**A lone wolf terrorist attacks Zafar Iqbal, a professor at a university in Sylhet, claiming Iqbal is "an enemy of Islam."
Ibal is stabbed three times in the back of the head, but survives the incident. Source: [Daily Star](#) [121]
- **December 12, 2017 - November 6, 2018:**Akayed Ullah, a green-card holder from Bangladesh and supporter of ISIS, attempts to detonate a pipe bomb in the passageway connecting the Times Square and Port Authority subway stations in New York.
The bomb, which was attached to his chest, fails to fully detonate. Ullah is the only person seriously injured in the attack. Port Authority police officers immediately subdue Ullah and take him to Bellevue hospital to treat his wounds. On November 6, 2018, Ullah is convicted in a New York court on six charges related to detonating and attempting to detonate a bomb near the New York Port Authority Bus Terminal on December 11, 2017. Ullah's sentencing date is set for April 5, 2019, where he faces a possible sentence of life in prison. Sources: [New York Times](#) [122], [U.S. Department of Justice](#) [123]
- **October 31, 2017:**Bangladeshi officials arrest four suspects who intended to hijack a commercial airliner and crash it into the homes of top-level politicians.
The suspects include a pilot of Biman Bangladesh airlines, and three others who had links to ISIS militants who carried out a terrorist attack on a Dhaka café in July 2016. Source: [Benar News](#) [124]
- **April 1, 2017:**Counterterrorism authorities launch Operation Maximus in Moulvibazar town and raid the hideout of militant group Neo-JMB, a JMB splinter group which also calls itself Islamic State-Bangladesh that has been suspected of transporting fighters into Iraq and Syria.
Three suspects blow themselves up in the raid upon confrontation with SWAT team forces. Sources: [Benar News](#) [125], [Crisis Group](#) [58]
- **March 25, 2017:**Two bomb attacks occur near a militant hideout in the northeastern district of Sylhet, which was the target of a police raid.

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

The hideout reportedly belonged to a domestic Islamist group that has pledged allegiance to ISIS. The attacks kill at least six people, including two police officers, and wound more than 40 others, including about a dozen army and police personnel. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [126]

- **March 24, 2017:**A suicide bomber detonates explosives at a police checkpoint near Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.
ISIS claims responsibility for the attack and identifies the assailant as Abu Mohammed al-Bengali. Source: [SBS](#) [127]
- **December 24, 2016:**The wife of a militant operative blows herself up during a police raid on a hideout in Dhaka, killing herself and wounding a seven-year-old girl.
The attack marks the first female suicide bombing in Bangladesh. Source: [Dhaka Tribune](#) [128]
- **July 7, 2016:**At least five militants used bombs and sharp weapons to target a police post in Kishoreganj, killing three people and wounding 14 more.
The police were guarding a festival celebrating Eid al-Fitr, the holiday ending the Islamic month of Ramadan. Source: [Reuters](#) [105]
- **July 1, 2016 - July 2, 2016:**On the evening of July 1, five Islamist militants storm into Holey Artisan Bakery, an upscale restaurant in the Gulshan neighborhood of Dhaka, and detonate explosives before separating the Muslim and local Bangladeshi hostages from the non-Muslims and foreigners.
After a 12-hour siege, Bangladeshi security forces storm the restaurant in the early hours of July 2 and free 13 hostages. The officials find 20 hostages hacked and stabbed to death, including Italian, Japanese, Indian, and U.S. citizens. Four militants and two police officers are killed over the course of the incident, and one militant is arrested. ISIS claims responsibility. Sources: [Reuters](#) [97], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [98], [CNN](#) [99], [BBC News](#) [100], [BBC News](#) [101]
- **July 1, 2016:**Three assailants on motorcycles use machetes to murder 50-year-old Hindu priest and temple volunteer Shyamanondo Das.
Das had volunteered at the Radhamadan Gopal Bigraha Math temple in western Bangladesh's Jhenaidah district. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [Dhaka Tribune](#) [129], [International Business Times](#) [130]
- **June 7, 2016:**Three assailants on motorcycles hack to death 68-year-old Hindu priest Anando Gopal Ganguly in western Bangladesh's Jhenaidah district.
ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [New York Times](#) [131]
- **June 5, 2016:**At least three assailants stab and shoot Mahmuda Khanam Mitu—wife of a regional police's deputy commissioner—in Chittagong, Bangladesh.
ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Washington Post](#) [132]
- **May 20, 2016:**Assailants use machetes to murder homeopathic doctor Mir Sanwar Rahman and his companion Mohammad Saifuzzaman while they are riding their motorcycles in western Bangladesh's Kushtia province.
ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [BBC News](#) [133], [CNN](#) [134]
- **May 14, 2016:**Seventy-five-year-old Buddhist monk Mong Shwe U Chak is found slaughtered in his temple in southeastern Bangladesh with machete wounds on his body.
The attack is not claimed by local militant groups, although it is believed to bear the hallmark of attacks targeting members of religious minorities. Sources: [New York Times](#) [109], [Daily Mail](#) [135]
- **May 6, 2016:**Sixty-five-year-old Sufi leader Mohammad Shahidullah is found hacked to death in a mango grove in the northeastern Bangladeshi district of Rajshahi.
ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [New York Times](#) [136], [CNN](#) [137]
- **April 30, 2016:**At least three assailants use machetes to murder Hindu tailor Nikhil Joarder while he sits outside his shop in the central Bangladeshi district of Tangail.
According to reports, Joarder had been arrested for two weeks in 2012 after allegedly insulting the Islamic prophet Muhammad, although the charges were ultimately dropped. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [BBC News](#) [138], [BBC News](#) [139], [CNN](#) [140]
- **April 25, 2016:**At least five assailants break into the home of U.S. embassy employee and LGBT activist Xulhaz Munnah, using sharp weapons to slaughter him and his friend, fellow activist Mahbub Tonoy.
Munnah was the founder of Bangladesh's only LGBT magazine, Rupban. AQIS's Bangladeshi branch, Ansar al Islam, claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [NPR](#) [17], [Reuters](#) [141], [Reuters](#) [142]
- **April 23, 2016:**Assailants murder English professor Rezaul Karim Siddique.
ISIS soon claims of responsibility for the attack, accusing Siddique of promoting atheism. Siddique taught at Rajshahi University, where three other academics had also been killed by Islamist extremists. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [143], [BBC News](#) [144]
- **April 6, 2016:**Assailants, including at least five machete-wielding men, kill liberal blogger and law student Nazimuddin Samad near Jagannath University.
AQIS's Bangladeshi branch, Ansar al Islam, claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [Bangladesh News](#) [145], [CNN](#) [146]
- **February 21, 2016:**Assailants—reported to be supporters of ISIS—behead a Hindu priest in Bangladesh's district of Panchagarh.
The victim, Jogeswar Roy, is attacked in his home within the temple. [BBC News](#) [147]
- **January 7, 2016:**Islamist militants kill a so-called apostate in Jhenaidah district, approximately 100 miles west of Dhaka.

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

ISIS claims responsibility for the attack the following day, stating, “Soldiers of the caliphate were able to eliminate the apostate, named ‘Samir al-Din,’ by stabbing him with a knife.” Reuters reports that local law enforcement stated only that a village doctor under a different last name was stabbed to death the same day. Source: [Reuters](#) [148]

- **December 25, 2015:** During Friday prayers, a suicide bomber targets an Ahmadiyya mosque in the Bangladeshi district of Rajshahi, killing one person. ISIS claims responsibility for the incident the following day. Source: [Yahoo News](#) [149]
- **December 24, 2015:** Authorities arrest three JMB militants in a raid outside Dhaka. The men reportedly conspired to execute attacks on Christmas Day. Among the items found in the raid were sixteen grenades and a suicide vest. Source: [Benar News](#) [150]
- **December 27, 2015:** A Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) team kill two JMB terrorists during the raid of a JMB den in Vogra of Gazipur District. One RAB member is injured in the raid. According to reports, authorities recover explosives, hand grenades, a pistol, ammunition, and books on jihad in the house. Source: [Benar News](#) [151]
- **November 26, 2015:** Militants attack a Shiite mosque in Bangladesh’s Bogra District, killing one cleric and wounding three others. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [Guardian](#) [152]
- **November 18, 2015:** Unidentified assailants shoot and injure Italian missionary Piero Parolari in the district of Dinajpur. Source: [Washington Post](#) [153]
- **October 31, 2015:** In related attacks, unidentified assailants target publishers throughout Dhaka, murdering one and severely wounding three. In central Dhaka, publisher and secular blogger Faisal Arefin Dipan is found hacked to death in his office. Also on October 31, armed men burst into the office of publisher Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, stabbing him and two of his colleagues, Ranadeep Basu and Tareque Rahim, before fleeing the scene. AQIS’s Bangladeshi branch, Ansar al Islam, claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [BBC News](#) [8]
- **October 3, 2015:** Assailants shoot and kill a Japanese agricultural worker in a rural area in Bangladesh. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. On February 28, 2017, five JMB militants are sentenced to death for their roles in the attack. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [153], [New York Times](#) [26], [PTI](#) [50]
- **August 7, 2015:** A group of assailants use machetes to murder Niloy Chakrabarti—a blogger known to use the pen name Niloy Neel—in his apartment in Dhaka. AQIS’s Bangladeshi branch, Ansar al Islam, claims responsibility for the attack. At least two of the assailants are identified by police as suspected members of the AQIS-affiliated ABT group. Sources: [CNN](#) [154], [BBC News](#) [155], [BBC News](#) [156]
- **September 28, 2015:** Three gunmen shoot and kill Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella while she is jogging in Dhaka’s diplomatic enclave. ISIS claims responsibility for the murder via Telegram and Twitter. Sources: [Guardian](#) [157], [Washington Post](#) [153], [New York Times](#) [26]
- **September 23, 2015:** ABT publishes a hit list targeting secular bloggers, activists, and writers. The list includes nine bloggers based in the United Kingdom, seven in Germany, two in the United States, one in Canada, and one in Sweden. Some are Bangladeshi citizens living abroad. Others are dual nationals or citizens of Western countries. Source: [Dhaka Tribune](#) [158]
- **August 7, 2015:** Approximately five men hack to death secular blogger Niloy Neel in his apartment. ABT, which also goes by Ansar al-Islam and is linked to AQIS, takes responsibility for the attack via social media, claiming the murder was revenge for statements made by Neel against the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The group promised future attacks for perceived affronts to Islam. Sources: [Ansar al-Islam](#) [159], [CNN](#) [154], [SITE Intelligence Group](#) [160]
- **July 2, 2015:** Bangladeshi law enforcement arrests 12 men allegedly connected to AQIS. The group was allegedly planning an attack on a Dhaka jail facility to release Islamist cleric Maolana Main Uddin. Source: [Daily Star](#) [161]
- **May 31, 2015:** Police arrest ABT’s operational commander, Mahfuzul Islam. Islam is believed to be responsible for a bank robbery in the Badda section in Dhaka. Source: [Eurasia Review](#) [51]
- **May 12, 2015:** At least four masked, machete-wielding men murder secular blogger Ananta Bijoy Das near his home in the northeastern district of Sylhet. Before his death, Das had written for the secular Mukto-Mona blog, a site once moderated by murdered blogger Avijit Roy. AQIS’s Bangladeshi branch, Ansar al Islam, claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [Reuters](#) [162], [BBC News](#) [163]
- **April 21, 2015:** ABT militants kill nine people while robbing the Bangladesh Commerce Bank Limited (BCBL) in a suburb near Dhaka. Source: [Eurasia Review](#) [51]
- **March 30, 2015:** At least two men with knives and meat cleavers murder 27-year-old secular blogger Washiqur Rahman outside his home in Dhaka. No group claims responsibility for the attack, which bears the hallmark of similar attacks on secular bloggers in the

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

- country. Sources: [CNN](#) [164], [Al Jazeera](#) [165]
- **February 26, 2015:**Assailants use meat cleavers to butcher Bangladeshi-born U.S. citizen Avijit Roy while he visits the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka. Roy was a blogger and moderator for the secular Mukto-Mona blog. AQIS's leader Asim Omar claims responsibility for the attack in a video released in May 2015. Sources: [CBS News](#) [166], [New York Times](#) [167]
 - **September 29, 2014:**Federal law enforcement officials arrest Samiun Rahman (also known as Ibn Hamdan), a British national of Bangladeshi descent. Rahman allegedly recruited for both ISIS and the Nusra Front while in Bangladesh. Rahman was also reportedly in contact with local Islamist extremist groups, including ABT. Sources: [Reuters](#) [168], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [56]
 - **September 25, 2014:**Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrest alleged ISIS propagandist Hifzur Rahman. Rahman is believed to have posted pro-ISIS propaganda on Facebook and attempted to recruit foreign fighters for the terror group. Sources: [BD News 24](#) [169], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [56]
 - **August 2, 2014:**ISIS uploads a video showing multiple individuals pledging their allegiance to ISIS in Bengali and Arabic. Sources: [ISIS Study Group](#) [170], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [56]
 - **January 19, 2014:**Police arrest a group of men reportedly connected to ISIS, including ISIS's regional commander at the time, Sakhawatul Kabir, as well as alleged terrorist financier Anwar Hossain. The men are accused of recruiting on behalf of ISIS and planning terrorist attacks in Bangladesh. Source: [Jamestown Foundation](#) [56]
 - **October 2, 2014:**Bangladeshi authorities reportedly uncover a JMB plot to overthrow the government following an apparent accidental detonation of a bomb in an apartment in Burdwan, West Bengal. Source: [Benar News](#) [171]
 - **February 15, 2013:**Thirty-year-old Bangladeshi blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider is found slaughtered near his home in Dhaka. Haider had been covering the February 2013 Shahbag protests, wherein an estimated 100,000-500,000 Bangladeshis gathered to call for the death sentence for convicted war criminal and former JeI member Abdul Quader Molla. AQIS's leader Asim Omar claims responsibility for the attack in a video released in May 2015. Source: [New York Times](#) [167]
 - **January 1, 2011:**Purported JMB members threaten to assassinate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and attack the Chittagong court and jail buildings. Source: [Combatting Terrorism Center](#) [44]
 - **November 14, 2005:**Assailants—reportedly affiliated with the JMB—assassinate two assistant judges on their way to court in Jhalakathi District. The incident is part of a series of attacks targeting government officials, court, buildings, and judges throughout the country. The JMB reportedly sought to compel the government to release approximately 400 jailed members of the JMB. Sources: [Global Security](#) [172], [Combatting Terrorism Center](#) [44]
 - **August 17, 2005:**In the span of approximately 30 minutes, JMB militants detonate approximately 500 bombs at 300 locations in 63 of Bangladesh's 64 districts, killing two people and injuring 200 others. Approximately 1,500 individuals are arrested in the ensuing investigation, including 850 JMB members. Since then, courts have found more than 200 of these individuals guilty, executing 58, including seven JMB leaders in 2007. Life sentences have been issued for 150 of the individuals found guilty, while many trials remain ongoing. Sources: [Combatting Terrorism Center](#) [44], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [173], [Indian Express](#) [174]
 - **August 2, 2004:**Unidentified militants kill 22 individuals after hurling grenades at a political campaign event in a failed attempt to assassinate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Source: [BBC News](#) [82]
 - **August 14, 2003:**A gunfight erupts between JMB militants and law enforcement in Joypurhat, in northern Bangladesh. Source: [Global Security](#) [172]
 - **February 13, 2003:**Bomb explosions in the northern town of Dinajpur force then-Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to initiate a crackdown on militants, including the JMB. Numerous suspected militants are arrested between February and August of 2003. Source: [Global Security](#) [172]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Bangladesh pursues multiple strategies in an effort to address the threat of domestic extremism and terrorism. With the help of international organizations and local religious scholars, the Hasina government has also launched grassroots and counter-narrative programs at the community level. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [175], [Guardian](#) [94], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [95], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [40])

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

Legislation and Law Enforcement

Bangladeshi law enforcement has primary responsibility for thwarting extremist and terrorist activity in the country. Mass arrests after terrorist incidents have allowed law enforcement to gain intelligence and arrest suspected terrorist operatives. These arrests have often targeted suspected members of violent extremist groups—including the JMB and ABT—as well as banned Islamist organizations—including the JeI and HT. On June 13, 2016, Bangladeshi law enforcement conducted a massive series of arrests in response to murders targeting secularists, religious minorities, and foreigners. As many as 14,000 individuals were detained in the sweep. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [175], [Guardian](#) [94], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [95], [Diplomat](#) [176])

Bangladeshi police have since continued to conduct arrests and raids targeting domestic terrorists. On July 26, 2016, Bangladeshi forces arrested one Islamist militant and killed nine others during a raid in Dhaka's Kalyanpur area. On August 27, police raided a JMB safe house in the Paikpara area of Narayanganj district, killing three Islamist militants, including the allegedly mastermind of the July 1, 2016, attack in Gulshan. On October 8, members of a Bangladeshi counterterrorism unit killed at least seven JMB Islamists residing in a two-story building in the Patartek area of Gazipur district. (Sources: [Daily Star](#) [177], [South Asia Terrorism Portal](#) [178], [Daily Star](#) [179], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [180], [South Asia Terrorism Portal](#) [178], [Astro Awani](#) [23])

In January 2017, Bangladeshi forces arrested Jahangir Alam, suspected of being a key planner of the Dhaka attack, a week after another planner, Nurul Islam Marzan, was killed in a shootout with police. In February 2017, police raided a house in the northern city of Bogra and killed Abu Musa (alias Abu Jar), believed to have been a close aide to one of the masterminds of the Dhaka attack. Musa was also wanted for the murders of two businessmen, one a Muslim and the other Christian, claimed by ISIS. Later in the month, police targeted and killed Aminur Islam, the northern regional commander of JMB's military wing who was alleged to have previously stabbed two police officers. (Sources: [PTI](#) [181], [Indian Express](#) [22], [CNN](#) [182], [New York Times](#) [183])

In 2015, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Hasina attempted to push the U.K. government to act against British-based recruiters and facilitators with ties to Bangladeshi terror groups. The Prime Minister said that the "Jamaat -e-Islami [Bangladesh's leading Islamist party] has a strong influence in east London. That's true. They are collecting money, they are sending money" to Bangladesh. (Source: [Guardian](#) [184])

In addition to prosecutorial efforts to counter violent extremism, Bangladesh also addresses extremism using legislation and enhanced border security. The government has also instated new terror financing laws to curb money flowing to extremist organizations in the country. (Source: [Awami League](#) [185])

In 2009, the newly elected Awami League party, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, created a 17-member umbrella organization known as the National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention. The committee, which sought to drum up public support against extremism, was led by the State Minister for Home Affairs, and included members from various ministries and security agencies. (Source: [Awami League](#) [185])

The Community Support Mechanism was formed in 2015 through the Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience (GCERF). The GCERF is a public-private global fund that helps to finance grassroots counter violent extremism (CVE) efforts. GCERF supported the CSM program in Bangladesh by funding a program that allowed local imams and religious scholars to create public awareness programs against extremism with the country's Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention. According to a report by the U.S. State Department, counter-narrative messaging from religious leaders has also helped police develop a plan to counter extremist propaganda. (Source: [2015 U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [186])

Bangladesh's focus on countering extremism has resulted in the dismantling of some extremist training camps along the Indian border. Authorities have also continued to arrest suspected foreign terrorists who were allegedly attempting to enter Bangladesh, including purported JMB leaders. The Bangladeshi government hopes that without its key leaders, the JMB will become too weak to continue engaging in violence in the country. (Sources: [South Asian Terrorism Portal](#) [187], [U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [188])

Bangladesh continues to implement new standards to its criminal justice system based on the 2012 and 2013 amendments

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

to its Antiterrorism Act of 2009 (ATA). Bangladesh does not legally prohibit “recruitment and travel in furtherance of terrorism,” but the U.S. State Department notes that the ATA, as written, does provide “several mechanisms” for Bangladesh to enforce UN Security Council resolutions that address combatting terrorism. (Source: [2015 U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [186])

On April 5, 2018, the Government of Bangladesh formed the first two anti-terrorism special tribunals in Dhaka and Chittagong. Although Bangladesh’s ATA does not specifically address foreign terrorist fighters, Bangladesh has arrested and charged suspected fighters or facilitators of migrant fighters under existing laws. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [189])

The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) of Bangladesh

In 2009, Prime Minister Hasina created the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) of Bangladesh to prosecute war crimes committed by violent Islamists during the country’s 1971 war for independence. Since 2009, the court has indicted 10 individuals on charges of various war crimes, including rape, murder, and crimes against humanity. Eight of these men are alleged leaders of the JeI, four of whom were hanged between 2013 and 2016. (Sources: [Indian Express](#) [80], [Guardian](#) [190])

In January 2013, JeI cleric and televangelist Abul Kalam Azad (also known as Bachchu Razakar) became the first person in Bangladesh to be convicted on the ICT’s charges of crimes against humanity. Having fled Bangladesh for Pakistan, Azad was tried in absentia by the ICT and sentenced to hang. His sentence has not been carried out. (Source: [Dhaka Tribune](#) [191], [BDNews24.com](#) [192])

The first to be hanged as a result of the tribunals was JeI politician Abdul Quader Molla. Molla was hanged in December 2013, after originally receiving a life sentence for his role in the 1971 murder of more than 350 civilians. The change in Molla’s sentencing has been credited to the popular Shahbag protests of February 2013, wherein thousands of attendants met in Dhaka’s Shabag square to demand that Molla be hanged for his crimes. Protest leaders also demanded a ban of the JeI and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), and called for amendments to the ICT Act to prohibit presidential pardons for those convicted by the ICT. Though the ICT has not been banned, JeI was banned in August of 2013, six months after the protests first erupted. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [193], [East Asia Forum](#) [194], [Dhaka Tribune](#) [195], [Bangladesh Awami League](#) [196])

There were four others sentenced to death for war crimes by the ICT since its inception in 2009. They are:

- Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, sentenced to death on May 9, 2013 on five counts, including mass murder, rape and torture and hanged on April 11, 2015. (Source: [Guardian](#) [197])
- Ali Ahsan Mujahid, sentenced to death on July 17, 2013 and hanged on November 22, 2015. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [198])
- Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, sentenced to death on October, 1, 2013 and hanged on November 22, 2015. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [198])
- Motiur Rahman Nizami, head of the JeI, sentenced to death on May 11, 2016. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [199])

International Counter-Extremism

Bangladesh has worked on the international arena to counter extremism. The country is a signatory to 14 U.N. Anti-Terrorism Conventions and Protocols, as well as the U.N. Convention against Transnational Crime, and the U.N. Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy signed in 2006. Bangladesh has also implemented domestic laws and policies to conform with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1267, 1373, and 1455, which sanction organizations and individuals associated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In 2012, Bangladesh passed the Money Laundering Prevention Act, which also sought to counter terrorist financing. (Source: [Daily Observer](#) [200])

Bangladesh has cooperated with foreign governments, including the United States and India, to improve its counter-extremism and counterterrorism policies. To that end, the United States and Bangladesh signed a Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative on October 22, 2013. The Initiative formally enabled U.S. expertise to assist Bangladesh in its efforts to comply with international counterterrorism standards. (Sources: [South Asian Terrorism Portal](#) [187], [2014 U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [188])

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

With U.S. cooperation, Bangladesh has enhanced its control over its border and continues to participate in U.S.-led counterterrorism programs. For example, Bangladeshi law enforcement officers continue to receive counterterrorism training through the U.S. State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance program. Areas of training include aviation security, crisis response, and explosive ordnance disposal. (Source: [2015 U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [186])

The U.S. State Department has also provided funding to help train members of Bangladesh's judicial and law enforcement systems. As part of this effort, the United States has provided prosecutorial skills training and community-oriented police training. Moreover, U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPAC) continues to provide "security and stability training" to the Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Coast Guard, and Bangladesh's Navy Special Warfare and Diving Salvage unit. In August 2016, former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Dhaka to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to supporting Bangladeshi counterterrorism effort and discuss ways to improve strategies and information-sharing. (Source: [AsiaNews](#) [201], [Diplomat](#) [202], [2015 U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [186])

In February 2017, on the sidelines of the Indian Geo-economic Dialogue in Mumbai, the state ministers for foreign affairs of Bangladesh and India agreed upon "constant engagements" to tackle emerging threats, including terrorism and radicalization. In mid-March 2017, Dhaka hosted a three-day conference of international chiefs of police to discuss efforts to combat terrorist violence. Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said his government has a "zero tolerance" policy toward violence that had led to "tremendous success" dismantling extremists and home grown militants in a country-wide crackdown launched after the July 2016 Dhaka café attack. He said his government would "work in partnership with religious scholars to discourage faith-based radicalization and to urge community leaders to guide young people toward more constructive beliefs and ideas." (Source: [BSSNews.com](#) [203], [bdnews24.com](#) [204], [Daily Star](#) [205])

On August 18, 2014, India's Border Security Force (BSF) reportedly shared the location of 66 militant camps in Bangladesh with the country's border control officials. India's BSF claimed that these Bangladeshi-based camps were the launching pad for attacks into and against India. While specific Islamist groups are not mentioned in reference to the BSF allegations, other reports indicate that, since 2001, the small town of Ukhia in Chittagong, Bangladesh, has served as a safe haven for Islamist militant organizations. (Sources: [South Asian Terrorism Portal](#) [187], [2014 U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [188])

Following an October 2014 bomb explosion in an apartment in Burdwan, West Bengal, a Bangladeshi investigation exposed a JMB cell that was reportedly connected to Islamist militant networks in India. The incident was a major motivation for India and Bangladesh's drafting the Coordinated Border Management Plan later that year. (Sources: [South Asian Terrorism Portal](#) [187], [2014 U.S. State Department Country Report](#) [188])

On April 10, 2019, it was reported that Bangladesh and Myanmar border guards have been cooperating to combat the Arakan Army, an insurgent group that has a presence on the border of the two countries, as well as Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a proscribed terrorist group in Myanmar. Although the two countries have a history of hostile diplomatic confrontations regarding the repatriation of over a million Rohingya refugees living in Southern Bangladesh, the two sides have agreed to cooperate to protect border areas from terrorism, drug trafficking, and gunfire. (Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [206])

Countering the Financing of Terrorism

Bangladesh is a founding member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) and the Bangladesh Bank work together to ensure that the government complies with international anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) standards and international sanctions. Bangladesh's ATA has a terrorist finance provision that stipulates that any receipt or collection of money, services, and material support related or in connection to a terrorist entity will be deemed illegal. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [189], [Asia/Pacific Group](#) [207])

Public Opinion

A 2015 poll of more than 2,000 Bangladeshis by the International Republican Institute found overall positive views of the country's economic progress, support for democracy, and majority support for democracy generally, as well as the current

Bangladesh: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

pro-secular government specifically. Corruption and law and order ranked high on a list of concerns, while extremism came in at the bottom with only one percent of respondents citing it as a particular issue of interest. (Sources: [BD News 24](#) [208], [International Republican Institute](#) [209])

A subsequent poll in March 2016 found a nine percentage point increase in the number of Bangladeshis who felt their country was headed in the right direction. Eighty-three percent of respondents said that security conditions in Bangladesh were very good, although anxiety about the security situation had increased eight percentage points since 2015. For the first time, the poll tested Bangladeshi public opinion regarding extremism. Fifty-three percent of respondents said they felt political extremism was a “very big problem” in Bangladesh, and 44 percent felt that religious extremism was a “very big problem.” Only six percent of respondents said that religious extremism was the main cause of extremism, with “political differences” the most common (38 percent) response. (Source: [International Republican Institute](#) [210])

An earlier poll in 2009 concluded that approximately 38 percent of the 1,000 Bangladeshis believed that democracy is compatible with Islam. Sixty-six percent polled stated that if a law was democratically passed it should not be vetoed for religious reasons. Almost a third of those polled supported the existence of some type of religious body to veto a law deemed un-Islamic. (Sources: [International Republican Institute](#) [209], [National Interest](#) [211])