

entailed a rapprochement between the prime minister and the two main hard line figures of the dynasty who have been on the rise since at least 2009: the army commander, Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, and his brother, the Royal Court Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa.⁶ The opposition considers the latter as having become the strongman of the regime in recent years. Before the uprising, they would only dare murmur his name. Considering him as particularly potent and harmful, they said he was the main supporter of the sectarian Sunni groups that have since gained visibility during the uprising as the vanguard of counterrevolution.

In recent months, there have been increasing signs that the hardliners altogether are doing everything in their power to counter many of the decisions made by the king to appease the opposition.⁷ This results in an incoherent policy from the government. On the one hand, it causes the opposition to trust the government less. On the other hand, both the opposition and the reformist faction of government know that they need each other to keep the balance of power weighted in their favor. The way that these power coalitions evolve in the coming months will be critical to deciphering the situation in Bahrain.

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6 Patrick Cockburn, "Power Struggle Deepens Divisions among Bahraini Royal Family," *Independent*, September 27, 2011.

7 *Ibid.*

Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh: Weakened, But Not Destroyed

By Animesh Roul

JAMAATUL MUJAHIDIN BANGLADESH (JMB), an indigenous terrorist group founded in 1998¹ and committed to establishing an Islamic state in Bangladesh through violence, stormed onto South Asia's jihadist scene with a synchronized, country-wide bomb assault on August 17, 2005.² The group detonated approximately 460 bombs within a 30-minute period at 300 locations in 63 of the 64 districts in Bangladesh.³ Later in 2005, JMB targeted the country's judiciary—court buildings, judges, and government officials—with suicide attacks in an effort to intimidate authorities into releasing around 400 JMB suspects arrested after the August countrywide blasts.⁴

Shortly after the incidents, authorities apprehended more than 700 suspected members of JMB and its affiliate party, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB). In March 2007, the Bangladeshi government executed a number of JMB's leaders, including its chief, Shaikh Abdur Rahman. Today, six years after the audacious terrorist attacks of 2005, Bangladesh's elite counterterrorism agency, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), claims to have neutralized JMB's core and substantially reduced the risk it poses.⁵

1 JMB has been operating since 1998 as a front for the lesser known al-Mujahidin. Some sources claim that it was founded in Palampur of Dhaka division by Sabir Qazi. According to other sources, JMB was formed by Abdur Rahman and Asadullah Ghalib in Jamalpur, Dhaka division. Its first documented act of violence was the assassination of Monir Hossain Sagar, the author of *Nari Tumi Manush Chhile Kobey*, in 2000 for the alleged indecent remarks about Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. JMB gained public prominence after accidental bomb blasts in Dinajpur in February 2003.

2 "459 Bombs in 63 Districts in 30 Minutes," *Daily Star* [Dhaka], August 18, 2005.

3 Surprisingly, only two people were killed, but nearly 100 people sustained minor to moderate injuries.

4 JMB perpetrated at least four suicide operations within a span of one month.

5 "JMB Neutralized," *Daily Star*, August 17, 2011.

Yet the JMB threat to Bangladesh has not been eliminated. While the group has been dramatically weakened, there are new concerns that it is attempting to reconstitute itself, especially in Bangladesh's northeastern districts.⁶ In January 2011, members of an alleged "JMB suicide squad" issued threats to assassinate Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and to blow up Chittagong Central Jail and the Chittagong court building unless authorities safely released detained JMB cadres.⁷ As of October, Bangladeshi authorities have arrested at least 25 JMB cadres in 2011,⁸ indicating that the group has been building support in various *madrasas* and urban ghettos in and around the capital Dhaka as well as Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Rajshahi, Jhalakati, and Naogaon districts.⁹ There are also cases where individuals with ties to JMB became involved in more transnational terrorist plots, such as the case of British Airways employee Rajib Karim who was drawn into the orbit of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) Anwar al-`Awlaqi.

6 There are reports of JMB operatives regrouping in different areas of Chittagong in the guise of rickshaw-pullers, masons and day laborers and involved in recruiting new members to reorganize the organization. See "JMB Regrouping in Chittagong: Hunt on to Nab Local JMB Commander Masum," *Daily Sun* [Dhaka], December 20, 2010.

7 "JMB Threatens to Kill Hasina," *Daily Sun*, January 6, 2011. The attack, however, failed to materialize. This was not the first time JMB threatened or schemed to attack political leaders. JMB had plotted attacks on both Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League and Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in mid 2009, using militants from India. It also listed second rung leaders of both political parties as their targets. See "Islamist Militants Planned to Kill Hasina, Khaleda: Report," Press Trust of India/OutlookIndia.com, August 6, 2009. The detained acting chief of JMB, Anwar Alam, disclosed to investigators in July 2010 that JMB has a hit list of 12 top political figures, mostly from the ruling Awami League Party. See "JMB Planned to Kill 12 Politicians: Arrested Acting Chief Discloses 'Hit List' to Interrogators," *Daily Star*, July 15, 2010.

8 This statistic was compiled by the author from open sources, especially from *Daily Star* coverage of JMB starting from January 2011.

9 The September 23, 2011 arrest of five JMB cadres who had in their possession jihadist literature and other incriminating documents from Aramnagar Kamil Madrasa in Sarishabari of Jamalpur district reveals the grassroots existence of JMB.

This article assesses JMB's current strength, which is based on interrogations from recently arrested operatives. It also examines the group's transnational linkages to show how JMB remains a resilient terrorist group despite government efforts to destroy its top leadership and organizational efforts.

JMB's Current Strength

In May 2010, authorities arrested JMB's current leader, Maulana Saidur Rahman, himself a former member of Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh (JIB). Authorities found in his home a "huge cache of bomb-making materials, firearms and ammunition."¹⁰ Police also raided the home of JMB's military chief, where they found an explosives belt usually worn by suicide bombers. Subsequent interrogations revealed that "hardliners had taken over the reins of JMB," suggesting that the group was plotting a series of explosions in Dhaka to attract new recruits to its cause.¹¹ Following leads from Maulana Saidur, police arrested a number of top leaders in July 2010 in Bogra, Joypurhat and Gaibandha districts. One of the arrested men and acting chief, commander Anwar Alam (also known as Bhagne Shahid), revealed that JMB is operating according to a new "10-year master plan" to achieve its goal of establishing an Islamic state in Bangladesh.¹²

JMB's chief, Maulana Saidur, told interrogators that the group had 400 full-time members across the country as of May 2010, as well as a military wing capable of launching large-scale attacks with an existing arsenal of explosives, homemade bombs and grenades.¹³ Those numbers, however, conflict with comments from Zahidul Islam Sumon (also known as Boma Mizan), a JMB explosives expert who was arrested in 2009. According to Mizan, JMB has 100 Eshar (full-time members in charge of a particular area), 500 Gayeri Ehsar (part-time members) and around 1,000 general members and 2,000 supporters.¹⁴

10 "JMB Chief Saidur Held," *Daily Star*, May 26, 2010.

11 "Depleted JMB Targets Dhaka, Detained Militants Tell Detectives," *Daily Star*, May 27, 2010.

12 "JMB Planned Countrywide Pre-Poll Attacks," *bd-news24.com*, July 16, 2010.

13 "Hardliners Take Over JMB: Detained Chief Tells Interrogators," *Daily Star*, May 29, 2010.

14 "JMB Finds Friends in Outlawed Parties," *Daily Star*,

JMB's actual cadre strength is unknown. After the 2005 serial blasts, Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies identified 8,096 JMB members, of which 2,000 were allegedly part of the group's "suicide squad."¹⁵ As of January 2011, authorities had arrested more than 1,500 JMB members, along with a few top leaders.¹⁶ Based on this assessment, there could still be thousands of JMB members operational.¹⁷ One reason for the discrepancy could be that the police account appears to count active members, volunteers, sympathizers or accomplices.

Today, JMB continues to recruit new members. Before the 2005 crackdown, JMB appeared to mostly recruit from *madrasas* and mosques in the country. Yet this has become more difficult due to police monitoring. Therefore, JMB has been using the internet and social networking forums to recruit new members online, luring university students to its fold. In late March 2011, RAB personnel arrested JMB's propaganda chief, Abdul Ghani, the outfit's chief coordinator of recruitment and training, Abu Huraira (also known as Shams), and their coordinator of training, Ashrafuzzaman. All of the men were in their 20s. Laptops, jihadist literature and training guides were seized from the operatives.¹⁸ According to investigators, Shams was working with information technology experts in Hizb al-Tahrir at many university campuses to recruit new members for their respective outfits by using different websites such as Yahoo and Facebook.¹⁹ JMB also appears to be increasingly recruiting from elite schools and universities.²⁰

There are also concerns that JMB has a female "hit squad" trained to execute grenade attacks. In early 2009, police arrested a number of alleged JMB female militants, accusing them of belonging to

April 25, 2010.

15 "Anti-Terrorism Unit in Police Soon," *Daily Sun*, January 3, 2011.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 "RAB Arrests 4 Suspected JMB Operatives in City," *New Age Bangladesh*, April 1, 2011.

19 *Ibid.* One Facebook page allegedly run by HT sympathizers denied HT-JMB links.

20 "The Threat from Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh," *International Crisis Group*, March 2010.

a JMB female cell.²¹ If accusations that the group has a female suicide squad prove true, it would not be a complete surprise; in 2004, JMB established a women branch with around 10-12 women in each cell, although they were mostly responsible for *da`wa* activities and religious teachings—not violence.²²

Transnational Outreach

Although JMB is considered an indigenous group seeking to establish an Islamic state in Bangladesh, its operational capabilities are not limited to the country. Evidence shows that JMB operatives along with its leaders nurtured ambitions to have transnational ties, primarily for fundraising and logistics.

JMB's past contacts with the UK-based Bangladeshi diaspora community in general, and ties to the banned al-Muhajiroun group in particular, are well known.²³ To raise funds for jihadist activities in Bangladesh, direct communication between al-Muhajiroun's Omar Bakri and JMB chief Abdur Rahman was coordinated by two al-Muhajiroun members identified as Sajjad and Habibur Rahman, who were both UK-based Bangladeshis.²⁴ It is not clear whether these ties exist today, but JMB likely maintains some links to the Bangladeshi diaspora community in the United Kingdom.

Since its founding, JMB formed ties with transnational militant groups such as HuJI and Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT) for training and funding purposes. LeT operative Mufti Obaidullah, who had close ties with JMB's senior operative Hasanuzzaman Hasan, once told interrogators that his task was to organize jihad in Bangladesh in cooperation with HuJI-Bangladesh

21 In early 2009, reports emerged regarding JMB's female hit squad headed by fugitive Razia Sultana. For details, see "Trained Female JMB Militants Appear on Scene for First Time," *Daily Star*, February 21, 2009. Also see, "Seven More Hauled Up in Hunt for JMB Jihadis," *Media Bangladesh/Independent*, February 22, 2009.

22 "The Threat from Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh."

23 *Ibid.*

24 Sajjad and Habibur Rahman, both from al-Muhajiroun, reportedly provided £10,000 to JMB for establishing bases for arms production in Bangladesh. Some of the funds were used in the August 2005 serial bombings. For details, see *ibid.*

and JMB operatives.²⁵ It is also known that LeT helped and facilitated JMB's recruitment drive in India, especially in the northeastern and southern parts of the country. The interrogations with Maulana Saidur revealed that as of 2010 JMB has managed to establish a significant presence in neighboring West Bengal (India), especially in Malda, Nadia and Murshidabad districts with around 25 Indian and Bangladeshi members. The Indian wing provides logistical support as well as guns and bomb-making equipment.²⁶

LeT was instrumental in sending Bangladeshi operatives for training in Pakistan, working through such groups as JMB and HuJI.²⁷ There are also cases of JMB members traveling to Pakistan to engage in fighting there. Confessional reports of JMB's explosives expert Boma Mizan shed some light on how one JMB operative, Shahed, traveled to the Swat Valley in Pakistan to "embrace martyrdom" through fighting against the military during the height of Operation Rah-e-Rast in April-May 2009.²⁸

JMB operatives are active in Europe as well. In September 2010, Jhenaidah district police arrested a German expatriate identified as Faruk Ahmed Aruj for his alleged link with JMB. Faruk had been living in Germany for the past two decades working as a manager of a fast food chain, and he was a core member of a mosque in Germany.²⁹

The Case of Rajib Karim

Yet the issue of most concern to Western counterterrorism agencies is JMB members who become involved in international terrorist plots, such

25 "Hasan Had Links with Obaidullah," *Daily Star*, July 20, 2009; *Jai Jai Din* [Dhaka], November 26, 2010.

26 "Bangladeshi Terror Outfit Running Camps in India," CNN-IBN, June 21, 2010.

27 Known Lashkar-i-Tayyiba operatives such as Abdul Karim Tunda and Mufti Obaidullah facilitated JMB's recruitment and training in India and Pakistan in the past. For details, see "Their Sinister Presence," *The Star* 9:40 (2010). For India's Intelligence Bureau's observation, see "Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar's New Cat's Paw Against India?" Rediff.com, December 29, 2010.

28 "JMB Planned to Kill, Foil Polls, Hasina, Khaleda were Prime Targets; About Dozen Operatives from India Hired to Execute Bloodshed Plot," *Daily Star*, August 6, 2009.

29 "Expat Arrested on Charge of Link with JMB," *Daily Star*, September 17, 2010.

as those planned by al-Qa`ida. Rajib Karim in the United Kingdom serves as the best example of this threat. Rajib, an alleged member of JMB, lived in the United Kingdom and was employed as an information technology expert with British Airways. Rajib's activities involved raising money and making propaganda videos for JMB. Yet Rajib eventually came under the influence of AQAP operative Anwar al-`Awlaqi, the charismatic Yemeni-American preacher based in Yemen and involved in a number of terrorist plots against the United States.

Rajib's brother, Tehezib Karim, and two other unidentified Bangladeshis, possibly JMB members, reportedly met al-`Awlaqi in Yemen in December 2009 and shared information about Rajib as well as his position at British Airways.³⁰ One can assume that they used the JMB name to help establish credibility and commitment to the jihadist cause. In subsequent e-mails between al-`Awlaqi and Rajib, al-`Awlaqi expressed excitement that Rajib worked for one of the world's biggest airlines. Rajib wrote al-`Awlaqi that he "worked very hard in painting myself as a liberal Muslim."

Although Rajib hated non-Muslims in the United Kingdom, al-`Awlaqi expressed to Rajib that an attack against the United States was al-Qa`ida's "highest priority." To redirect Rajib, al-`Awlaqi wrote, "Our highest priority is the US. Anything there, even on a smaller scale compared to what we may do in the UK, would be our choice."³¹

Rajib then attempted to switch jobs within British Airways, seeking a position as a cabin crew member. He was rejected, however, because he had not worked for the airline long enough. Al-`Awlaqi asked Rajib, "With the people you have [other employees at

30 One independent investigation in Bangladesh found that JMB could establish links with al-Qa`ida in Yemen through a religious research organization called the Research Centre for Unity Development (RCUD), where Tehezib Karim's father-in-law is the chairman. At least another three Bangladeshi youth were detained in Yemen along with Tehezib for their links with al-Qa`ida. For details, see Tipu Sultan, "RUCD Terrorist Group's Sponsor, Coordinator," *Prothom Alo* [Dhaka], March 2, 2011.

31 Andrew Carey, "British Airways Worker Guilty of al-Qaeda-Linked Terror Plot," CNN, February 28, 2011.

British Airways] is it possible to get a package or a person with a package on board a flight heading to the US?" Rajib reassured, "I can work with the bros to find out the possibilities of shipping a package to a US-bound plane."³² Ten days later, however, UK authorities arrested Rajib, who eventually received a 30-year prison sentence.

Conclusion

At first glance, JMB's strength and activities inside Bangladesh appear depleted, especially following the arrests of senior leaders. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that the group has been neutralized. The Rapid Action Battalion has yet to tackle JMB's jihadist ideology and grassroots support, which has helped the organization survive against the ongoing security offensives and investigations. The biggest concern is that JMB will spearhead a conglomerate of different jihadist groups and actors in Bangladesh in the years ahead.

As the case of Rajib Karim demonstrates, there is also the risk of radicalized members of JMB joining more transnational terrorist groups such as al-Qa`ida. JMB's ties to the Bangladeshi diaspora community in the United Kingdom warrant concern. In the case of Rajib Karim, however, it does not appear that the JMB governing body had knowledge of the Karim brothers' plan. Yet regardless of whether JMB's governing body approves of such transnational attacks, the ideology they instill in their members makes it inevitable that some cadre will seek to join other terrorist groups or cells that are committed to attacking Western interests.

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32 Bill Chappell, "British Jury Convicts Airline Worker in Bomb Plot," National Public Radio, February 28, 2011.